IN THIS ISSUE: RELIGION, TRADE, AND TRANSPORT – THE ROLE OF RIVERS IN ANTIQUITY (CA. 5000 BC - AD 400)

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NO. 54

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How did the poetry of Enheduanna, a Sumerian princess, survive for millennia?

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What types of vessels did people use to travel along the rivers of the ancient world?

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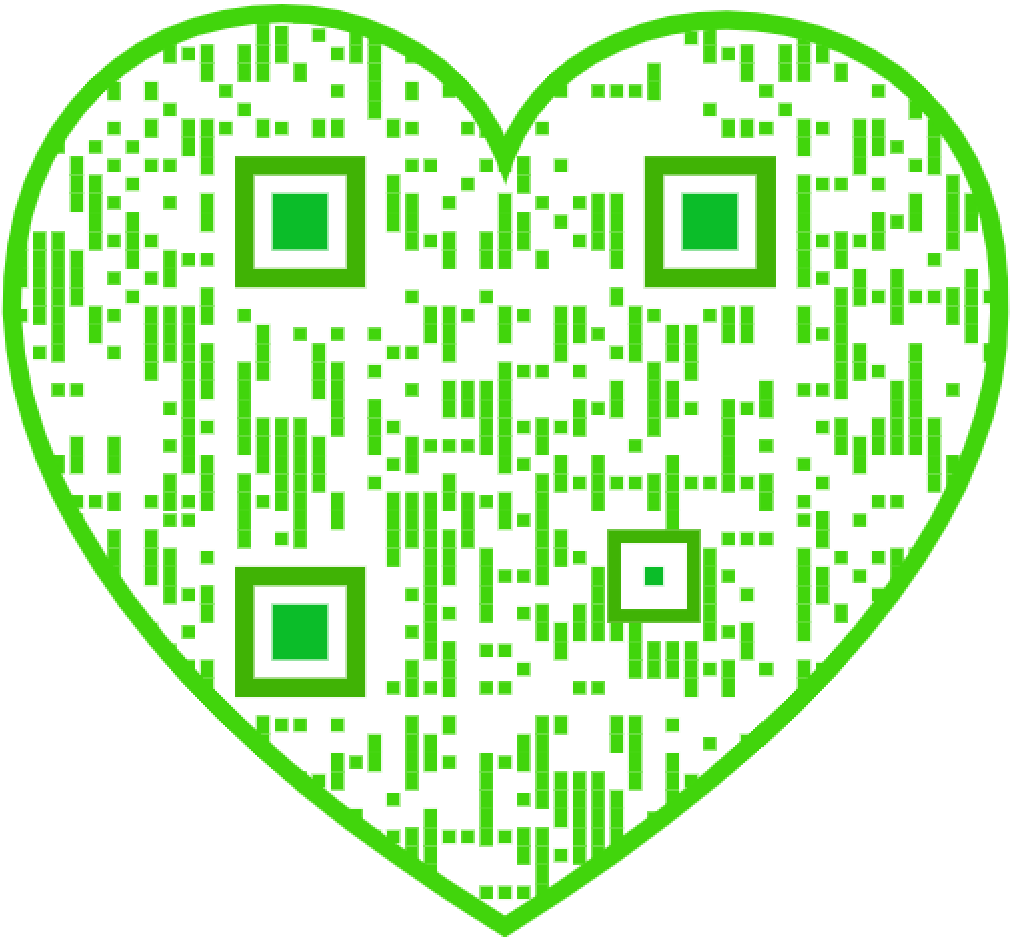
Chariot racing was a huge sport in ancient Rome, but how was it organized?



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ON THE COVER

A section of the Nile mosaic from Palestrina, a floor mosaic depicting the course of the Nile down to the Mediterranean. The Nile was but one of many important rivers in antiquity, albeit one of the most famous. Rivers great and small provided sustenance and transport routes, allowing communities to survive and even thrive. Rivers were so important that they developed a religious significance.

© Carole Raddato / Flickr

RIVERS IN ANTIQUITY

Rivers were an incredibly important part of the ancient landscape. Not only were they useful transport routes for goods and people, but also powerful forces that accrued their own religious significance.

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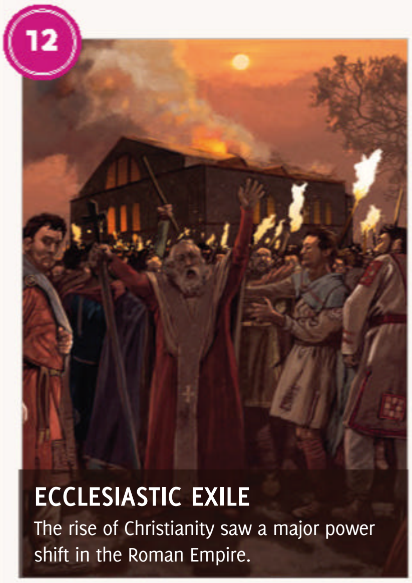

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The rise of Christianity saw a major power shift in the Roman Empire.

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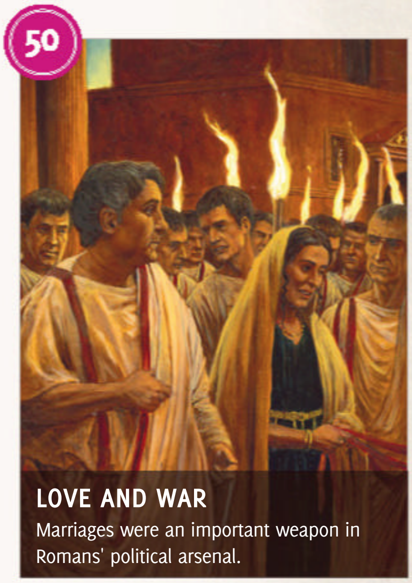


LOVE AND WAR
Marriages were an important weapon in Romans' political arsenal.

EDITORIAL – THE FLOW OF HISTORY

In the modern, developed world, the mystery and power of rivers has mostly been reduced to a byway for slow-moving bulk goods and expensive leisure vessels. However, nature occasionally reminds us of the power and importance of rivers, often with tragic consequences. Floods can be devastating, causing terrible damage, while droughts can cause famines with long-lasting consequences.

In the ancient world, people were more than aware of the importance of rivers. They brought much-needed drinking water, they watered crops, and they served as natural defences and highways. Without modern technology, even with the relatively advanced engineering of ancient Rome, floods were frequent, and famines were even more dangerous. As such, rivers were given far more respect, they were even revered as gods in their own right. There are so many different facets of ancient people's relationships with rivers that we could have covered. In this issue, we have produced as broad an overview as possible, hopefully demonstrating the diversity of the ancient world. There is, as always, much more to cover.

Owain Williams
Editor, *Ancient History*

Ancient reclamation centre found at Metropolis

A site believed to have functioned as a junkyard or reclamation centre has been found by archaeologists in the ancient city of Metropolis, located in İzmir, Turkey. They uncovered around 2000 bronze fragments of statues that were deliberately broken in antiquity to be melted down and recast into new items. Among the recovered pieces are heads, eyes, fingers, and sandals, along with square and rectangular bronze plates, indicating the city's role in statue production or repair.

"For our profession, these are extraordinary finds," Professor Serder Aybek, from Dokuz Eylül University, told local media. He explained that bronze statues were significant artworks in the ancient world, and that their fragmentation at Metropolis suggests a process of recycling.

Wreck of Phoenician ship returns to dry land

A 2600-year-old Phoenician shipwreck has been successfully removed from the seabed off the coast of southeastern Spain by marine archaeologists.

The ancient vessel, known as *Mazarrón II*, was first discovered in 1994, near the town of Mazarrón, just 1.8 m (6 ft) below the Mediterranean Sea's surface. It had been carrying a cargo of lead ingots when it sank and was preserved under sand for centuries. Archaeologists invested 560 hours diving at the wreck site to make detailed diagrams of its remains, cracks, and fissures.

However, coastal developments and shifting sea currents left the wreck increasingly vulnerable to destruction. In response, a team of fourteen divers worked between September and November 2024 to carefully retrieve the 8.2 m- (27-ft)-long wooden ship, piece by piece. The fragments have now been transferred to the National Museum of Underwater Archaeology in Cartagena, Spain, where specialists will undertake a meticulous four-year conservation process. This will involve removing sea salt, reinforcing rotted sections with resin, and freeze drying the wood. When stable, the ship's timbers can be reassembled. Archaeologists hope the vessel will provide fresh insights into how the Phoenicians built ships, as well as the environmental impacts on ancient maritime relics.

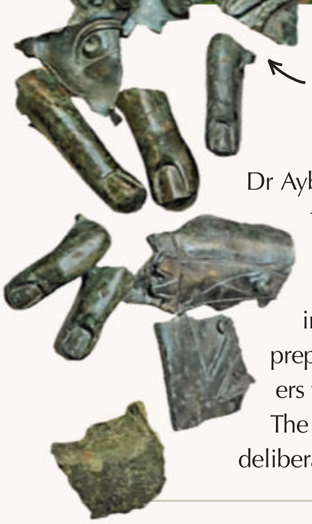
© CARM

Two divers can be seen inspecting the ***Mazarrón II*** **shipwreck off the coast of southeastern Spain.**

"The wreckage has survived for centuries, but now it is time to roll up our sleeves and ensure that we can continue to enjoy this asset of cultural interest," said lead archaeologist Carlos de Juan.

A similar Phoenician vessel, *Mazarrón I*, was recovered from the same area in 1995; it is now displayed at Spain's National Museum of Underwater Archaeology.

A Phoenician silver ring with a soapstone scarab, dated to the seventh century BC, discovered as part of the Mazarron II shipwreck.
© Nanosanchez / Wikimedia Commons



A collection of bronze statue fragments from the city of Metropolis in Anatolia.

© Andalou Agency

Dr Aybek suggested that some of the bronze was likely repurposed for coin minting. "Instead of re-manufacturing, damaged statues were prepared by ancient junk dealers to be melted," he said.

The statues appear to have been deliberately destroyed, possibly due to shifting religious beliefs. With the rise of Christianity in Late Antiquity, bronze statues of mythological characters lost their significance and were broken up, Aybek explained.

Fragments date back to the Hellenistic and Roman periods, reflecting Metropolis' historical importance as a cultural and trade hub from the third century BC.

The discovery was made during excavations as part of the Future Heritage Project, a collaboration between the Turkish Ministry of Culture and Tourism and the Sabancı Foundation.

A view of the walls of Metropolis, a city on the Aegean coast of Anatolia in the modern province of Izmir, Turkey. Due to the discovery of 2000 bronze fragments of statues inside the city, it is believed there was a centre meant to repurpose the old bronze.

© Nudjet Duzen / Shutterstock

Mass of oldest known blue pigment found in Nero's palace

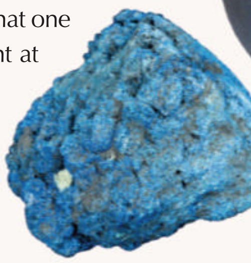
A collection of pigments used to decorate the Domus Aurea with frescoes nearly 2000 years ago have been found while excavating the ruins of Emperor Nero's palace in Rome.

The discovery includes an *amphora* containing yellow ochre, jars filled with reddish pigments such as realgar and red ochre, and basins where artisans likely mixed colours with water. However, the most significant find is a large ingot of Egyptian blue, a highly-prized substance. Unlike ochre and realgar, which occur naturally, Egyptian blue is a synthetic pigment produced by heating silica, limestone, and copper-containing minerals. First developed in ancient Egypt around the third millennium BC, it became widely used across the Mediterranean. Traces have been identified in sites such as Pompeii and the Baths of Titus.

Making this discovery remarkable is the size of the Egyptian blue ingot, weighing over 2.4 kg (6 lbs) and measuring 15 cm (6 in) long – suggesting extensive use in the palace's frescoes. Archaeologists are now investigating whether it was produced locally in Italy or imported from Egypt. Viturvius, the first-century-BC Roman architect, reports that one Vestorius produced blue pigment at Puteoli (*On Architecture* 7.11.1).

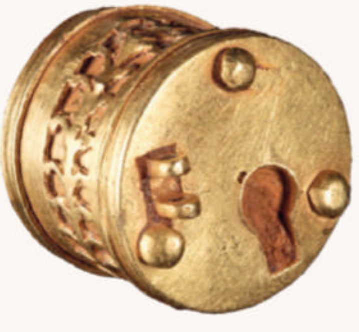
An example of a so-called 'Egyptian blue' amphora, dated to ca. 1479-1425 BC. The pigment known as Egyptian blue was popular throughout the Mediterranean in antiquity.

© The Walters Art Museum



The ingot of Egyptian blue pigment, weighing 2.4 kg, discovered during excavations in the Domus Aurea.

© Parco arhceologico del Colosseo / Simone di Murrone



The golden lock that was recently discovered in Westphalia, Germany. While the exterior appears well preserved, the interior mechanisms have long since rusted.

© LWL /S. Brentführer

Exquisite Roman box lock discovered

A licenced detectorist scanning a field in Pershagen, Westphalia, Germany, made the chance discovery of a lifetime when he recovered a small golden lock from the ground. Shown the find, archaeologist Michael Rind, from the Landschaftsverband Westfalen-Lippe (LWL), described it as "completely unique in Europe". Measuring just 11 by 12 mm, it is believed to be a miniature version of box locks commonly used across the Roman Empire in the third and fourth centuries AD.

The lock, as found, includes only its cylindrical component, though it would likely have featured a key and chain. Its casing was constructed from two cylindrical sheets of metal, sealed with lids at the top and bottom and secured with three rivets. The outer sheet was finely decorated with two rows of opposite openings.

Researchers initially questioned whether such a small lock could have even had a functioning mechanism. Standard X-ray and 3D X-ray computer tomography (CT) proved inconclusive, revealing only the lock's gold casing, a chain end link, and a rusty iron core inside.

To investigate further, specialists used advanced 3D neutron CT scanning. This technique, conducted by Dr David Mannes and Dr Eberhard Lehmann from the Paul Scherrer Institute in Switzerland, successfully revealed the lock's internal workings, including a spring, bolt, baseplate, guide rail, and pin.

LWL cultural director Barbara Rüschoff-Parzinger praised the find as evidence of the exceptional skill of Roman blacksmiths.

"Was it a one-off, or have similar miniatures simply not been found?" Mr Rind asked rhetorically. "We will continue to investigate."

Pompeii excavation reveals large private bathing complex

One of the largest known private bathing complexes within a Roman *domus* has been found in Pompeii.

The excavation in *Insula* 10 of *Regio* IX has revealed an extensive bathing complex with an *apodyterium* ('changing room'), *calidarium* ('hot room'), *tepidarium* ('warm room'), and a *frigidarium* ('cold room'), capable of hosting up to 30 people. The cold bath area, featuring a 10 x 10 m peristyle courtyard with a central pool, reflects the wealth of the property's owner.

Few other examples of this size are present in Pompeii, such as the baths of the *Praedia* of Julia Felix and those of the House of the Labyrinth and the Villa of Diomedes.

MORE ONLINE
Watch a video about the new discovery: https://bit.ly/3FqUm7A

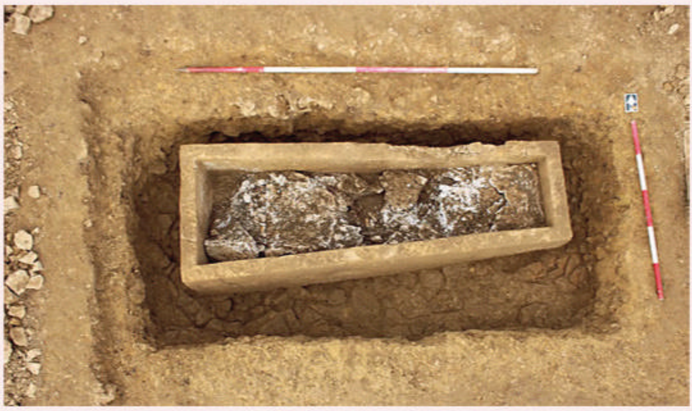
Rare Roman liquid gypsum burial found in Britain

The burial of an individual encased in liquid gypsum – a soft white or grey mineral consisting of hydrated calcium sulfate – and sealed in a stone coffin has been excavated by archaeologists at a Roman-era cemetery in Cambridgeshire, England. This is a technique known from Roman times but is still not fully understood.

This process sometimes preserves organic materials. In this specimen, impressions of a shroud and a small piece of fabric were identified. Gypsum burials are typically associated with urban Roman centres like York, making this example in a rural context particularly rare. The gypsum was artfully carved and transported 48 km (30 mi) from a quarry, suggesting significant wealth.

The cemetery was found ahead of a project to expand the A47 road. It contained fourteen graves located beside the gypsum burial with seven more beyond a boundary ditch. Dating to AD 43–410, they feature a mix of burial styles, including cist, cremation, and decapitation burials.

One grave, positioned southwest of the gypsum burial, belonged to a young woman aged sixteen to twenty. She was buried with a cache of jewellery at her feet, including silver earrings, nine copper alloy bracelets, three copper alloy rings, and a silver signet ring fragment. Archaeologists theorize this may have been intended as her dowry. Another burial, beyond the boundary ditch, contained a child interred with similar silver earrings, copper alloy and bone bracelets, and a bone comb. While their similarity suggests a distinctive local craftsperson, it does not necessarily indicate a familial connection.



© Headland Archaeology

The stone coffin containing a body encased in gypsum was recently discovered in Cambridgeshire, England. It is a rare example of a rural gypsum burial, with such burials being more common in urban areas.

A glass cup discovered close to the gypsum grave.

© Headland Archaeology

A view of the brightly painted ***apodyterium*** ('changing room') in ***Insula*** 10 of Pompeii's ***Regio*** IX. The house's rich decoration has survived in incredible condition.

© Pompeii Archaeological Park

The bathing suite is directly connected to the adjacent *triclinium* ('banquet room'). "Everything was functional to the staging of a show," said Parco archeologico di Pompei director Gabriel Zuchtriegel. Inspired by Greek culture, the lavish setting, complete with Trojan War frescoes and athletic imagery, aimed to impress guests and reinforce the owner's social standing.

References in Roman literature, such as Petronius' *Satyricon*, highlight how baths and banquets were central to elite living, serving not only leisure interests but also political networking. The *domus*, which occupied the southern part of Insula 10, is believed to have belonged to a prominent local figure.

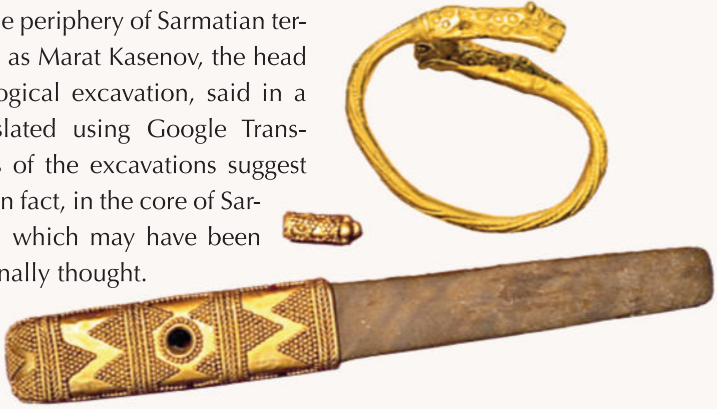
The main entrance to the *domus* was to the south. An *atrium* was probably located here, which led to a large peristyle that occupies almost the entire width of the block and, of which, the upper parts of the corner columns, not yet excavated, can be seen.

Sarmatian graves discovered in Kazakhstan

Archaeologists excavating the Karabau-2 burial mound 10 km north of the village of Karabau, in the Qyzylqoga district of Kazakhstan, have uncovered nine graves, seven of which were unlooted. Two other nearby burial mounds held between ten and fifteen graves. The graves contained a wealth of artefacts, suggesting to the archaeologists that the tombs belonged to 'royal' Sarmatians.

Over the course of 2023–2024, three burial mounds – Karabau-2, Karakuduk-1, and Karakuduk-2 – in the Atyrau region of Kazakhstan, all of which date to the fifth century BC, were subject to archaeological investigations. Approximately 1000 artefacts were uncovered during the excavations, 100 of which were pieces of gold jewellery decorated with images of animals. An exceptional example is a bracelet with a mountain leopard design at each end weighing 370 g. Two touchstones with gold handles, which would have been used to determine the quality of gold, were discovered in the Karabau-2 mound.

It was previously thought that the Atyrau region was on the periphery of Sarmatian territory. However, as Marat Kasenov, the head of the archaeological excavation, said in a statement (translated using Google Translate), the results of the excavations suggest the region was, in fact, in the core of Sarmatian territory, which may have been larger than originally thought.



Several of the gold objects recovered during archaeological excavations of Sarmatian burial mounds in the Qyzylqoga district of Kazakhstan. The quantity of gold in the burial mounds led scholars to dub them 'royal' burials.

© Government of Kazakhstan

1000 BC
1500 BC
2000 BC
UR: ca. 2300 – 2230 BC
2500 BC

A view of the excavated remains of Ur, with the reconstructed ziggurat of Ur in the background. Enheduanna was the high priestess of Nanna in Ur.

THE WORLD'S FIRST NAMED AUTHOR

ENHEDUANNA

By Louise M. Pryke

For trainee scribes living 4000 years ago in ancient Mesopotamia, the written works of one famous early author was a critical part of the teaching curriculum. The author of these ancient compositions was a priestess and poetess, one who wrote hymns of extraordinary beauty and power while serving the lunar deity. Her name was Enheduanna.

Enheduanna is the world's first known individually named author. She was born into royalty as the daughter of the famous king, Sargon of Akkad, in 2285 BC. Enheduanna lived in Ur, an area located in modern-day southern Iraq. Sargon, her father, was the first ruler to unite northern and southern Mesopotamia. In doing so, he created the Old Akkadian Empire, which is often described as the world's first empire. Enheduanna lived during a period of great social, religious, and political upheaval, and in her role as a priestess, she would have been involved in shaping these changes.

A diorite statuette of Enanatumma, high priestess at Ur and daughter of King Ishme-Dagan, dated to ca. 1950-1900 BC. Royal women filled positions of religious authority in ancient Mesopotamia, much like Enheduanna.

© U Penn Museum

Masterpieces from Mesopotamia

The world of ancient Mesopotamia was home to numerous literary masterpieces. These include the world's first tragic epic, *Gilgamesh*, the Babylonian creation narrative, *Enuma Elish*, and the early flood story, *Atrahasis*. Yet Mesopotamian literature was generally written anonymously, but sometimes attributed to deities or legendary figures, a method meant to confer the figure's authority to the poem.

Alongside these literary treasures, Enheduanna's works stand out for her distinct authorial voice, and her passionate praise of the Mesopotamian goddess of love, Inanna (Semitic Ishtar). Enheduanna was a figure of authority both in her historical setting, and in the literary world.

Priestess of the moon deity

The author held an important religious role as a high priestess of the moon god, Nanna (associated with the Semitic lunar deity Sin). In Mesopotamian religion, women filled a variety of roles, with Enheduanna occupying a position known as '*en* priestess'.

An Old Babylonian hematite cylinder seal, dated to the early second millennium BC. It depicts a suppliant approaching the goddess Ishtar, who was equated with Inanna.

© The Metropolitan Museum of Art

It seems likely that Enheduanna would have supervised a sizable group of temple administrators. These personnel would have overseen everything from the observance of festivals and cult rituals to practical matters such as the distribution of grain, livestock administration, and property maintenance.

Later high priestesses of the moon god are thought to have been involved in the running of scribal schools for elite women. An example of one of these later priestesses is Ennigaldi-Nanna from the Neo-Babylonian Empire, who is sometimes described as the world's first museum curator. It seems possible that Enheduanna would have also been involved in education and the scribal arts. In any case, if she were not involved in the education of scribes in her own time, she certainly contributed to their training at a subsequent point in history.

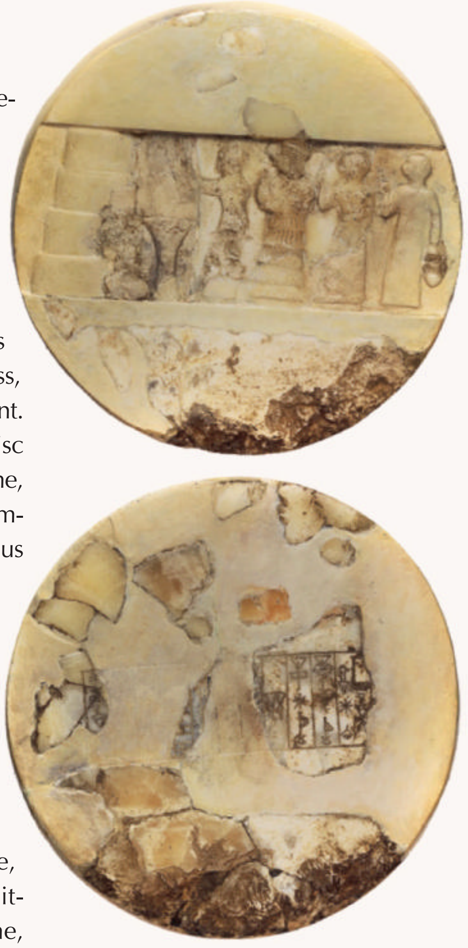
A statuette of a lady in a worshipping stance, dated to ca. 2600-2350 BC.

© Livius.org

The Disc of Enheduanna

In terms of evidence, some traces of Enheduanna's role as high priestess have been found in material culture. Along with some cylinder seals, there is an alabaster relief, inscribed with her dedication, known as the Disc of Enheduanna. This relief was discovered by British archaeologist Sir Charles Leonard Woolley and his team of excavators in 1927.

The disc was discarded and apparently defaced in antiquity, but the pieces were recovered through excavations and the scene featuring the writer successfully restored. On one side, there is a scene of sacrifice, and on the other a written inscription. The scene depicts the priestess at work. Along with three male attendants, she observes a libation offering being poured from a jug. Enheduanna is situated in the centre of the image, with her gaze focused on the religious offering, and her hand raised in a gesture of piety. The image on the disc emphasizes the religious and social status of the priestess, who is wearing a cap and flounced garment. While the inscription on the reverse of the disc is fragmentary, it gives Enheduanna's name, and appears to describe the action of the image, where the poet is performing a religious dedication for the deity, Inanna of Ur.



A view of both sides of the Disc of Enheduanna, a circular calcite panel decorated with a relief depicting a sacrifice and an inscription referring to Enheduanna, dated to 2300 BC.

© U Penn Museum

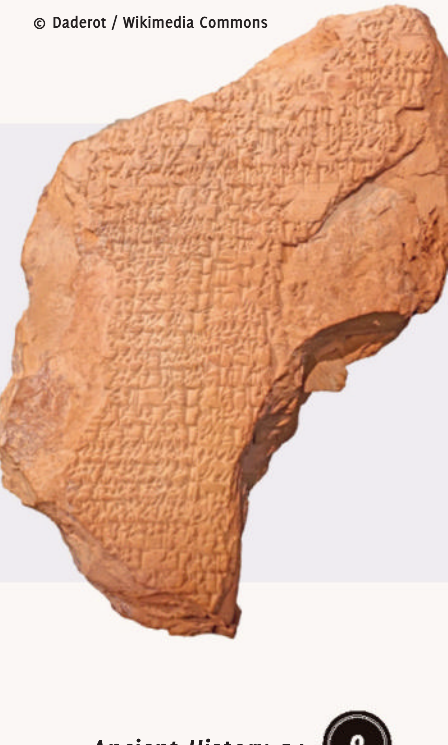
Hymns to the goddess of love

Enheduanna's writings are written in Sumerian using the cuneiform script, which is considered the world's oldest known form of writing. Sumerian began to disappear as a spoken language towards the end of the Old Akkadian Empire, but it persisted in written religious and literary works. During Enheduanna's lifetime, Sumerian was the language of southern Mesopotamia, while Akkadian was spoken in northern Mesopotamia.

Among these writings, the most well-known are her two hymns to the goddess of love and war, Inanna. Inanna was a prominent figure in the Mesopotamian pantheon, featuring in numerous written texts including myths, laments, hymns, and love songs. A close connection to Inanna was something of a family trait for Enheduanna. Her father, Sargon, features in several mythic narratives which credit his survival and success to the merciful intervention of the goddess. *The Exaltation of Inanna* and the *Hymn to Inanna*

A Sumerian tablet inscribed with the myth of *Inanna and Ebih*, a poem attributed to Enheduanna.

© Daderot / Wikimedia Commons



The importance of Inanna

Enheduanna's relationship with Inanna and her several poems to the goddess may reflect the Sargonid dynasty's cooption of the deity for political means. Prior to Sargon's conquests, Inanna was worshipped throughout Mesopotamia, but her main centre of worship seems to have been Uruk, with the Eanna district of the city devoted to the goddess from its earliest period. Uruk was also, coincidentally, the main centre of opposition to Sargon's conquests in southern Mesopotamia.

With his defeat of Uruk, Sargon may have adopted Inanna as his protector in an attempt to assert his authority over the city. In the Sumerian legend of Sargon's origins, for example, Inanna protects Sargon from the schemes of Ur-Zababa, the king of Kish. Her worship, especially after she was syncretized with the goddess Ishtar, was promoted by Sargon and his successors, being one of the most invoked deities in their inscriptions.

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A terracotta vase, dated to the early second millennium BC, known as the 'Ishtar Vase', depicting the goddess surrounded by various animals. Ishtar was equated with Inanna in ancient Mesopotamia, with the Sargonid dynasty promoting the goddess' worship.

© Marie-Lan Nguyen / Wikimedia Commons

A copper alloy foundation peg in the shape of a bull, dated to the 22nd century BC, from the temple of Inanna of Girsu.

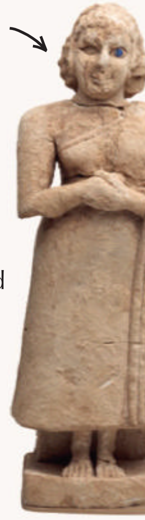
© Zunkir / Wikimedia Commons

show Enheduanna attempting to describe a goddess known in the present day for her resistance to easy categorization. Faced with this formidable task, even the poetess herself expresses doubts over her ability to rise to the challenge within her compositions.

The praise of the deity was not purely for literary effect – in her hymn, Enheduanna approached the goddess for assistance with pressing practical concerns. Enheduanna prays to Inanna to seek her assistance when challenged by a usurper named Lugal-Ane. In the *Exaltation of Inanna*, Enheduanna tells the goddess that Lugal-Ane has threatened her life and expelled her from office, and she enlists Inanna's divine support to return to her official role.

Authorship and unanswered questions

Enheduanna's status as the world's first named poet and author is not universally accepted. Written works ascribed to Enheduanna have survived only in copies dated hundreds of years after the time in which she lived and worked. The lack of texts in Enheduanna's name from the Old Akkadian period has led to the suggestion that the surviving materials may be composed in her name, rather than copied from her work. Of course, it is impossible to prove the matter either way. Even if we had texts from Enheduanna's time, it would remain possible that her compositions could have been commissioned – perhaps in the style of a Mesopotamian version of the ghost-written celebrity biography. However, the texts themselves assert the priestess' authorship in plain terms, along with declaring the originality of her creations. The content of her hymns is deeply personal, autobiographical, and frequently uses the first person singular grammatical case. In the absence of compelling evidence against her status as an author, it seems only polite to take this ancient author at her (written) word. Despite the lack of scholarly consensus, there can be no doubt that Enheduanna's name was seen to provide the hymns ascribed to her with authority and meaning.



A Sumerian limestone statuette of a female worshipper, dated to ca. 2600–2500 BC.

© The Metropolitan Museum of Art

The educational use of Enheduanna's writings in the ancient world played a critical role in the preservation of these works. Understanding how Enheduanna's literature was used in these settings holds value for exploring how her works and authorship were received by later writers. However, the education of scribes in Mesopotamia is an area involving many mysteries. It is thought that works by Enheduanna were included in a group of texts known as the 'Decad', dating to the Old Babylonian period. These texts are generally thought to have been used for scribal training exercises; however, this view is not unchallenged, with an alternative suggestion being that they were grouped together for archival purposes. Enheduanna's writing was preserved with other Sumerian wisdom texts, hymns, and myths at numerous ancient sites, yet the absence of any contemporaneous texts explaining

A bronze statue head of an Akkadian ruler, likely either Sargon of Akkad or Naram-Sin. Under the Sargonid dynasty, Upper and Lower Mesopotmia were united into the Old Akkadian Empire, although each ruler faced various rebellions. Under Naram-Sin, a usurper called Lugal-Ane may have removed Enheduanna from her role as High Priestess of Nanna.

© Eric de Redelijkheid / Wikimedia Commons

Rise and nearly fall

If Enheduanna were the daughter of Sargon of Akkad, and she lived long enough to see the rebellion against her nephew, Naram-Sin, Enheduanna may have witnessed the rise and what must have looked like the fall of the Old Akkadian Empire.

According to various sources of questionable reliability, such as the Sumerian King List, Sargon started life in the city of Kish, possibly the cupbearer of Ur-Zababa, the king of Kish. He likely usurped power from Ur-Zababa, taking the throne name Sharru-kin (Sargon), meaning 'the king is legitimate'. He then gradually expanded his rule to encompass nearly all of Mesopotamia, claiming to have reached the Lower Sea (the Perian Gulf), and beyond, referring to the cedar forests of Lebanon in one inscription. Control of this vast empire was not easy to maintain for Sargon's successors, however. Naram-Sin, his grandson, faced a serious rebellion by an alliance of city-states, led by Kish and Uruk. He was able to put the rebellion down, but to Enheduanna, who suffered at the hands of Lugal-Ane, the end of her family's reign must have seemed imminent.

the purpose of these collections leaves much room for speculation.

Literary range

As well as the two hymns to Inanna, Enheduanna is credited as writing a collection of temple hymns, which are a cycle of works praising various deities and their earthly homes. The collection is composed of 42 hymns. The poet shows a great depth of knowledge of the various temples and their environmental settings, while defining the distinct divine powers of the deities.

The myth of *Inanna and Ebih* is sometimes also attributed to Enheduanna, although unlike her other compositions, it doesn't bear her name. In this story, the goddess of love and war becomes angry due to the failure of the mountain (the eponymous Ebih) to show her respect by bowing down to her. Inanna seeks assistance from the sky deity, An, before waging war upon the landmark and destroying it. In the final section of the composition, the goddess is showered with praise. While a different genre to the hymns, the myth reflects many of the same aspects of the love deity that are seen in *The Exaltation of Inanna*, and the myth is referenced in Enheduanna's *Hymn to Inanna*. In the hymns and the myth, the goddess' powerful, anthropomorphic emotions are presented as a driving force behind her actions, and descriptions of her awesome divine power are a central focus. The importance of approaching the goddess with appropriate deference and respect is also emphasized.

Reception

Despite the fame of her works in antiquity, Enheduanna is largely unknown in the modern day. She is occasionally mentioned at the beginning of surveys of female authorship in studies of literature and was the focus of an exhibition at the Morgan Museum and Library in 2022. The poet's name is becoming more recognizable in studies of the history of science and astronomy, due to the presence of celestial observations in her writings.

Over 4000 years on from the time of her writing, Enheduanna remains a powerful voice in the history of literature. Despite the intensely personal style of her hymns, she remains an enigmatic figure. While much remains unknown about this early author, through her compositions we gain significant insights into Mesopotamian culture, religion, and politics. **AH**

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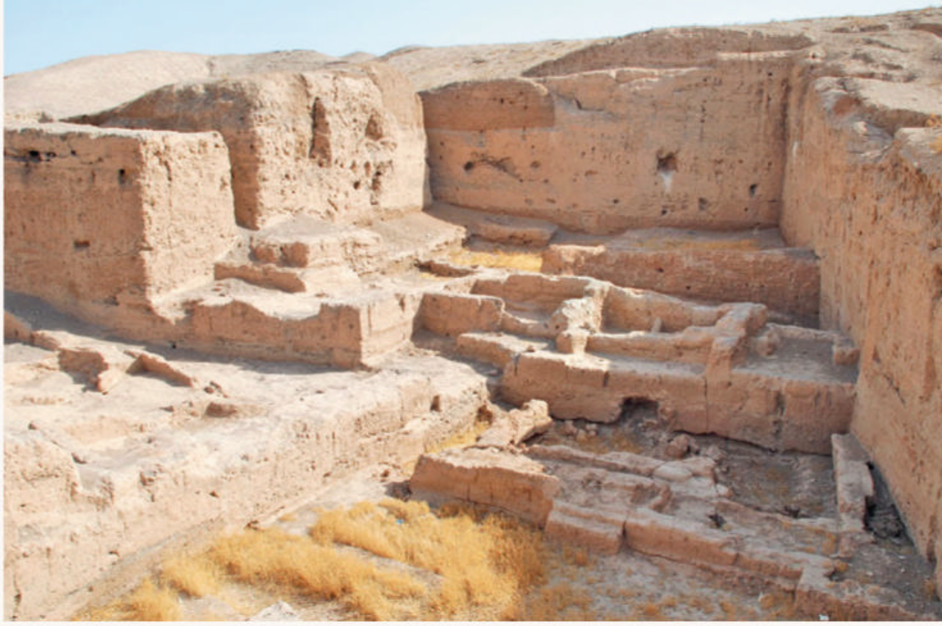

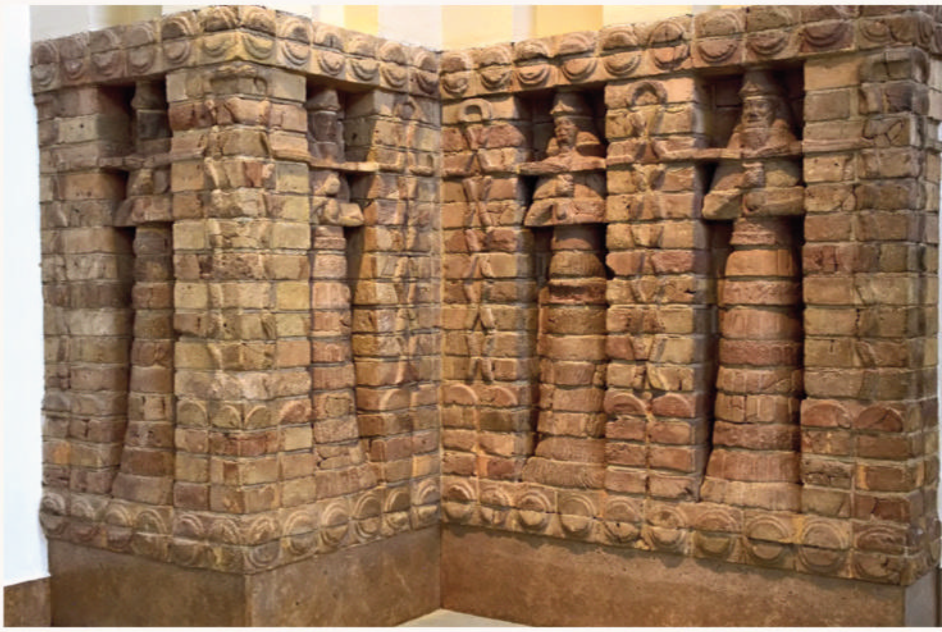

(Top) A view of the excavated area labelled TW in Tell Brak, the site of the ancient city of Nagar. A monumental building containing 'eyes' idols was discovered here. The Sargonid dynasty may have destroyed the site when they conquered it, but it was later rebuilt and used as an administrative centre of the Old Akkadian Empire.

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(Bottom) A façade decorated with figures of male and female divinities in alternate niches that was part of the temple precinct in Uruk dedicated to the goddess Inanna. The new temple was erected in the fifteenth century BC under the Babylonian king Kara-indash.

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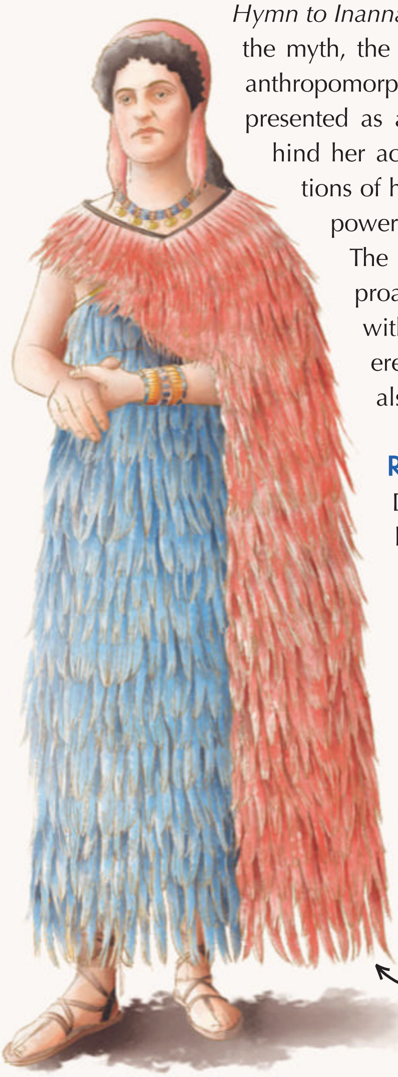
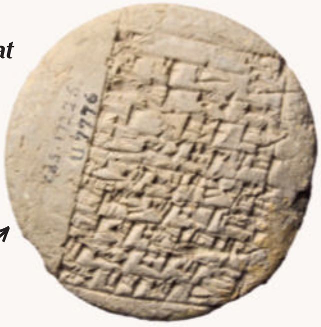


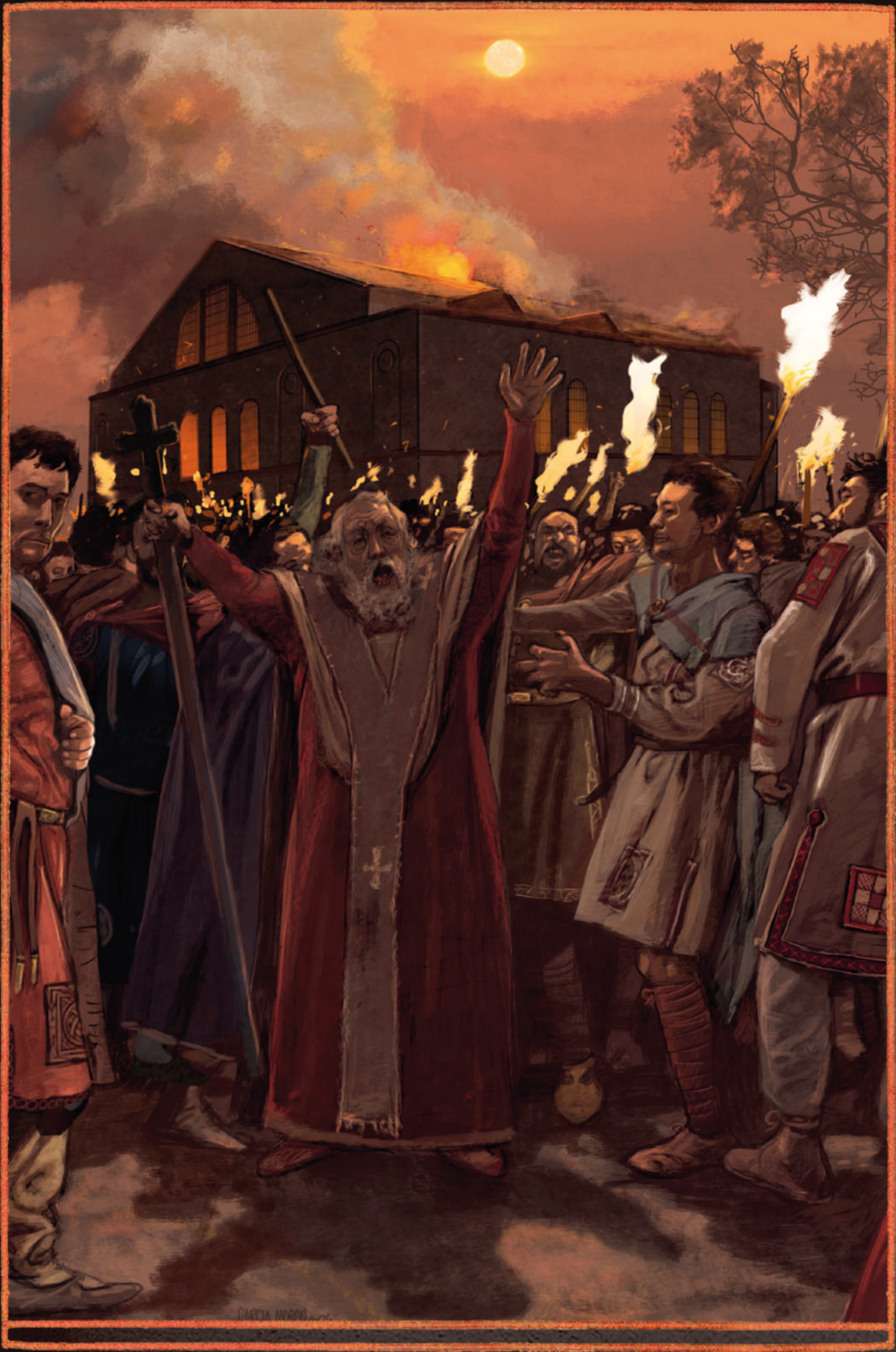
A reconstruction of an ancient Mesopotamian priestess from the late third millennium BC.

© Julia Lillo



An inscribed clay cone fragment from Ur, dated to ca. 2000–1900 BC, recording the building of the storehouse for Inanna at Ur.

© U Penn Museum



WHO WAS REALLY IN CHARGE?

EMPERORS AND BISHOPS

By Jennifer Barry

With the rise of Constantine the Great, the Roman Empire and its citizens saw a shift in both imperial power and religious tolerance. At the Battle of the Milvian Bridge (AD 312), Constantine took control of the Roman Empire and eventually rose to the position as its sole leader (AD 324), which would help secure a permanent position for those who adhered to the Christian faith. However, the Christian faith was multi-faceted, with several sects competing for primacy in the new order.

The problem was what version of Christianity would ultimately receive imperial support? For the leaders of the Christian faith, primarily bishops, any relationship with the empire was a fraught one. While currying the emperor's favour and gaining access to his court was a desirable outcome, many Christians were at odds with one another and undecided on how imperial leaders might gain influence over or participate in the faith. The mercurial attitudes of emperors had proven disastrous for Christians in the past but also had the potential, at least in theory, to unify a frequently divided Christian minority. Constantine's new age of tolerance introduced a high-stakes game that exaggerated divisions among Christian factions. New enemies appeared to lurk everywhere as more and more Christian leaders sought out opportunities to gain power, prestige, and control.

But how much power did bishop's really have once emperors not only tolerated, but favoured the Christian faith? In the minds of our earliest writers – and the texts that survive – quite a bit. Yet that leverage could be easily undermined or taken away if the charge of heresy (that is, wrong belief) was made loud enough and gained the wrong sort of attention. As Constantine's golden age ended with his death in AD 337, his sons found themselves in the awkward position of inheriting an empire where Christians were no longer a nuisance they could simply kill off. Instead, Constantine's favouritism of certain bishops over others had resulted in regional divisions that often put the brothers at odds with one another. One bishop, in particular, Athanasius of Alexandria, would be at the center of many of these conflicts.

A priest urges a crowd in Constantinople to call for the return of John Chrysostom. However, the crowd has gotten out of hand, and the Magna Ecclesia has been set alight.

© Jose G. Morán

The increasingly-shifting religious tenor that moved away from the traditional polytheistic empire to one centered on the power and influence of a singular Christian god caused quite a bit of political and theological strife as regional ecclesial leaders jockeyed for control. Imperial leaders were forced to change the rules on how to deal with troublesome Christians. Rather than sentencing Christian leaders to death, episcopal leaders were now granted the same legal rights as any Roman man from the upper-class. For example, bishops were sent into exile rather than handed over for corporal punishment. What has often proven difficult to discern within Christian records, however, was who orchestrated an exile – was it an emperor or a Christian council? Moreover, was it really an effective tool for limiting the influence of a powerful bishop? In Athanasius' case, exile appeared to bolster his career rather than harm it. Whether an emperor or council laid claim to his removal did not appear to matter.

Athanasius the perpetual exile

In the early days of his role as a bishop, Athanasius found himself frequently on the defensive, largely due to the unconventional path to power and influence over Alexandria. He began serving as a deacon as soon as he was old enough, and under the guidance of Alexander, the bishop of Alexandria from AD 313 to 328, Athanasius became a trusted assistant and protégé. He is believed to have been present at the famous ecumenical Council of Nicaea in AD 325, which was convened by Constantine to resolve several divisive issues, such as what books were to be included in the Bible and the nature of the Holy Trinity, and he quickly became a staunch supporter of its theological decisions. Nicaea, while ultimately unsuccessful in its efforts to unify Christian disagreements, soon became an ideal and standard that Athanasius and his supporters would cling to in the following years. Several statements of faith and practices were voted on along with a host of canons. These theological issues became a measure by which many bishops would align and either link or distance themselves from to argue their version of Christianity.

As an ardent defender of Nicaea, Alexander, and those who supported him, secured Alexandria's position as a powerful player in ecclesiastical matters that shaped many of the theological battles moving forward. When Alexander passed away, Athanasius was immediately appointed as his successor, despite not meeting the required age for the position. Thus, Athanasius' tenure as the bishop of Alexandria was controversial from the start and many attempted to cut off his influence. Throughout his career, Athanasius was removed from his position approximately five times. During his first two exiles, he left Egypt altogether. Conflicting reports say Constantine, after learning Athanasius had tampered with the

The Arian Controversy

The Arian Controversy, one of the most divisive theological conflicts of the fourth century, emerged as bishops sought imperial favor while struggling to define Christian orthodoxy. Centered around the teachings of Arius, a priest from Alexandria, the controversy questioned the nature of Christ's divinity. Arius argued that the Son was created by the Father and thus subordinate, a stance opposed by Athanasius and others who championed the Nicene declaration that Christ was *homoousios* (of the same substance) as the Father.

The Council of Nicaea (AD 325), convened by Emperor Constantine, sought to resolve the debate, but disagreements persisted, exacerbated by imperial politics, and shifting allegiances. The controversy led to repeated exiles and reinstatements of bishops, including Athanasius, shaping the fragile relationship between emperors and church leaders. Though Nicaea's doctrine ultimately triumphed, the struggle underscored how bishops, not emperors, wielded lasting influence over defining Christian belief.

grain supply out of Egypt, had sent him to Trier (modern day France). Other reports, mainly preserved in Athanasius' defensive works, state he was removed by Constantine to save his life. Athanasius was also condemned at several councils but appeared to be vindicated in competitor councils. Thus, the exact reasons for his exiles remain a mystery due to conflicting accounts in historical sources.

Athanasius was far from a passive victim. His experiences as a bishop in exile worked to his advantage in decisive ways. He returned for a final time in AD 364 and remained in power until his death in AD 373. He skillfully crafted a rhetorical persona as a persecuted leader that resonated strongly with his audience. It enhanced his influence and extended well beyond his own lifetime. Gregory of Nazianzus, on the anniversary of Athanasius' death, solidified his legacy as a model exile and leader. Later ecclesiastical historians would also turn to Athanasius as a standard by which exilic orthodoxy was determined.

Those who also experienced displacement and returned proved themselves as true defenders of the faith. But not all exiles were created equal. Those who were cast out and did not return were potentially harbingers of deceit – that is, until their exiles were comparable to Athanasius. We see this process in several cases, but the most well documented relates to a slightly later, but equally controversial figure, John Chrysostom, whose exile was the exception that proved the Athanasian rule.

An (un)orthodox exile

While John Chrysostom would come to be remembered as the 'Doctor of the Church', many of his contemporaries dealt with the embarrassing reality that he died while in exile. He faced his first exile in AD 403 and was permanently expelled from Constantinople on June 20 AD 404. He then spent the remainder of his life in exile, passing away in September AD 407. His exile was a problem because he did not return. Additionally, the events leading up to his removal from and eventual death were marred in conflict and scandal.

John was born around AD 349 in the city of Antioch, a remote part but significant strategic location on the eastern border of the Roman Empire. The city of Antioch was a melting pot of religious and ethnic identities and played host to significant Roman, Christian, and Jewish religious sites. Like Alexandria, its regional identity and political and ecclesial influence was significant. John's training and education was also a mixture of high classical training and strict Christian ascetic practice. For example, John's rhetorical training was spirited on by the influential non-Christian rhetorician Libanius, but his spiritual education was linked to the bishop of Antioch Meletius, who was also exiled and died while defending his case at the second most significant ecumenical Council of Constantinople in AD 381, where many of Nicaea's theological ideas were expanded upon and reaffirmed.

Like Athanasius, John's episcopal post was controversial from the moment of his election in AD 397, due in part to his political and religious ties to one of the more unpopular (at the time) Christian factions in Antioch. For instance, John's career and spiritual tutelage was guided under Meletius' successor, Flavian. The middle-to-late fourth century was filled with political and religious conflict. At one point, Antioch had four competitor bishops. The battle over episcopal succession and creedal statements were carried by John to Constantinople. His tenure as the bishop of Constantinople was thus brief. In addition to his questionable alliances, John's so-called golden mouth (what Chrysostom translates as) also contained a sharp tongue. He frequently criticized the activities and habits of the local elite in and around Constantinople in his acerbic sermons and even dared to take on the imperial household. His stance seems to have made him popular among the people of Constantinople. The news of his initial banishment in AD 403 appears to have spurred a riot in the city, with the Magna Ecclesia, a large church built by Constantius II on the site of the later Hagia Sophia, being burned in the chaos.

Constantinople, or New Rome, played a major political and theological role in the growing battle over Nicene orthodoxy and the leader of its ecclesiastical influence was a direct threat to other significant episcopal power houses like Alexandria. John Chrysostom's troubles in Constantinople were further exaggerated by his tense relationship with another Alexandrian bishop who disagreed with John's version of Christianity. Theophilus of Alexandria proved to be a thorn in John's foot, and his temporary alliance with the Empress Eudoxia, who appeared to have it out for John, helped ensure his removal from the city. While John was widely unpopular during his lifetime, he also had a strong contingent of supporters that ensured that his legacy was secured by linking his experience of exile to Athanasius.

Shortly after the news of Chrysostom's death reached his supporters in Constantinople in AD 407, John's reputation as an orthodox bishop became the intense focus of a Johannite faction who, immediately after his death, attempted to clear his name. Much like Athanasius, John's faults and charges of illegal activity are difficult to point to as the main cause for his departure. For example, John was loosely connected to the controversies surrounding a growing support for Nicene Christianity because of his ties to Meletius and Flavian, but he was also posthumously connected with later controversies that made him an easy target for Alexandrian politics.

Two strategies were used to resurrect John's reputation. In the mind and imagination of John's biographers, it took a divine act of vengeance to save John from infamy. Two biographers, Pseudo-Martyrius and Palladius of Helenopolis, placed the blame on the shoulders of the meddling Empress Eudoxia and the outsider bishop Theophilus of Alexandria.

In the first phase, authors heavily criticized the empress, who conveniently passed away before their writings became widely known. Each writer argued that her death in childbirth was a fitting punishment for her role in expelling John from Constantinople. While acknowledging others' involvement, they vividly described her suffering and violence to pin the blame on her and absolve John of any wrongdoing.

In the second phase, John's contemporary, the fiery bishop Theophilius of Alexandria, was portrayed as villainous. Unlike his respected predecessor Athanasius, Theophilus was depicted as a fraud. Biographers made significant efforts to disconnect him from Athanasius' orthodox legacy, instead attributing it to John through their shared experiences of exile. Examining the aftermath of John Chrysostom's initial exile and his controversial return to Constantinople, both Pseudo-Martyrius and Palladius drew comparisons between John and Athanasius, whom they revered as "the Great Athanasius".

Both independent narratives recount how Theophilus fled to Egypt following scrutiny over a council he convened to discredit John. Emperor Arcadius, depicted more sympathetically than his wife, demanded an explanation. Defying the emperor, Theophilus dispatched envoys bearing Nicene canons aimed at discrediting John and challenging imperial authority over church matters. Ironically, these canons, once used against Athanasius, were now wielded by his foes to smear his reputation and hinder his return to power. Pseudo-Martyrius highlights the strategic addition of a law to prevent a retrial after deposition, a tactic employed against Athanasius. Palladius echoes this story but dismisses the council's legitimacy and stated John's removal in AD 403 was not lawful, thus justifying his return.

Pseudo-Martyrius and Palladius assert that attempts to use Nicene canons against John backfired, strengthening his association with Athanasius. They argue that John, not Theophilus, embodied Athanasius' legacy, facing accusations akin to those levied against the revered figure. Consequently, it was Theophilus' actions, not John's associations, that condemned him in these accounts.

Due to these posthumous efforts, John was vindicated in AD 418, with his body returning to Constantinople in AD 438. However, the discourse surrounding his exile highlights a broader issue: episcopal exile doesn't always denote doctrinal correctness. Though eventually hailed as a pro-Nicene hero, John's true influence during and after his lifetime remained uncertain. Like Athanasius, he became a symbol of Christian orthodoxy, his legacy shaped by those who chronicled his story and the alliances he cultivated in his lifetime.

Who holds the power?

The legacy of Athanasius of Alexandria cast such a long shadow that even John Chrysostom, whose initial exile seemed like a failure, found redemption by association. Athanasius' image as an exile was meticulously crafted, both in his own writings and in the accounts of his supporters. His multiple exiles became a powerful narrative adopted throughout the empire.

During a time when narratives of Christian orthodoxy were closely intertwined with memories of persecution under imperial rule, authority within the Christian community was established not just by the deeds of the deceased but also by the actions of the living.

So, who was really in charge? Did emperors or empresses have much ecclesial power? From the point of view of late ancient Christians, the answer was simple: no. In the golden age of imperial Christianity, the bishops held the keys to both the earthly and heavenly realms. As savvy politicians, bishops knew when to criticize the leaders of the empire (when they were safely buried) or when to flatter the man (or woman) in charge. Emperors, too, however, were mindful of their new Christian alliances. They were careful not to make martyrs out of influential figures and they had learned that even exiling them was a dangerous game. This early system of checks and balances was often carefully orchestrated after-the-fact, but the bishop and emperor appeared to have a keen shared awareness of political and religious power struggles.

The model exile Athanasius stood out not just as a victim of these struggles but was remembered as a defender of the faith. His legitimacy was reinforced by his resilience as an exile. John Chrysostom's story was a bit trickier to reconstruct, but his biographers did their best to shape John in Athanasius' image to reinforce this new status of the powerful bishop in the face of adversity. By linking John with the esteemed legacy of Athanasius, his identity as a defender of orthodox Christianity was secure and those who challenged him, even in death, were not exempt from retribution. **AH**

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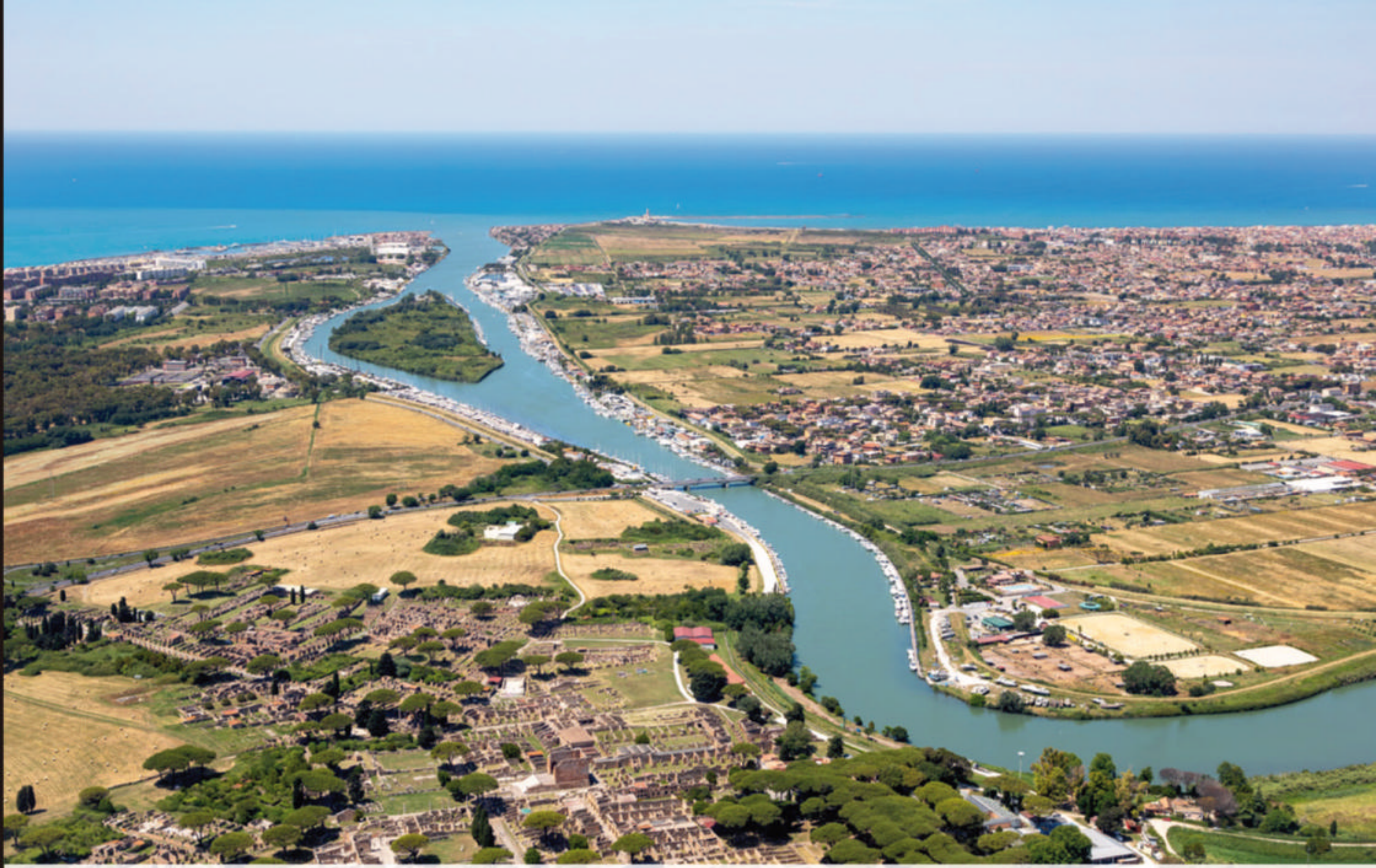


An aerial view of the mouth of the Tiber, with the ruins of Ostia Antica, one of the Roman ports on the river, on the left bank. The Tiber was an important element of Rome's history, simultaneously offering protection, resources, and a transport route.

THEME

ROME'S GREAT FATHER

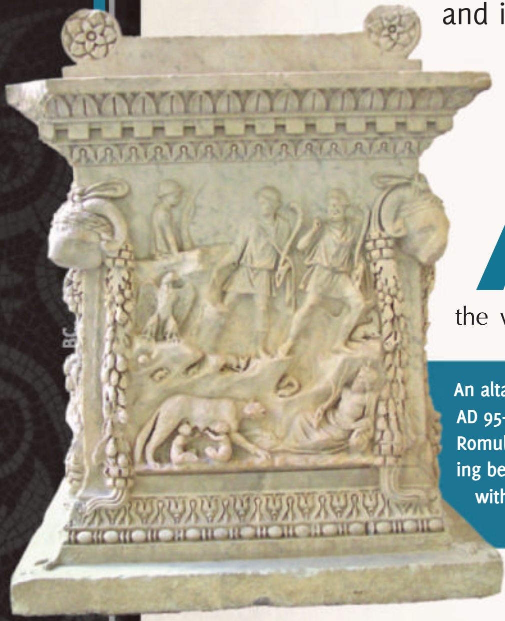
THE RIVER TIBER

By Daniel Kershaw

The Tiber was a multifaceted and integral icon of Rome's origins, identity, and strength. It existed as a sacred and secure boundary, a source of sustenance and supply, and a conduit of trade, expansion, and urban waste. Thus, the Roman poet Virgil rightly called it the Genitor Urbis ('father of the city'). Indeed, just as the Nile was pivotal to the growth and development of the Egyptian civilization, the Eternal City and its vast empire owed much of its strength and vitality to the Tiber.

As many historians have noted, the advantageous topography of the Tiber valley made it an ideal site for a flourishing city. It is the widest valley in the Italian peninsula, with the river creating a series of rich floodplains. The famous 'Seven Hills of Rome', where there is evidence of settlement from at least the eighth century BC, sit on the southern bank of this great meandering river. For the first settlers of the site, the combination of these hills and the fast-flowing river created not only an agriculturally rich site for development, but one with added security, as the river warded off attacks from across it and the hills offered a vantage point from which to watch for threats. In a similar manner, the hills constituted convenient retreats from the recurrent flooding of the valley.

The ancient myths that explored Rome's origins also stressed the riverine nature of its foundation. The name given to the river, in some accounts, was attributed to the Alban King Tiberinus who drowned in the river, to afterwards become the river god Pater Tiberinus. More notably, the river featured in myths about Romulus and Remus, who are accredited with founding the city of Rome. Their mother Rhea Silvia was ordered to dispose of the twin babies by putting them into a basket and letting them be taken away by the Tiber's current. However, the river flooded and allowed them to drift ashore at a



An altar dedicated to Mars and Venus, dated to ca. AD 95-120, depicting the she-wolf suckling the infants Romulus and Remus and the river god Tiberinus reclining besides them. The Tiber was intimately connected with Rome's identity from its very founding.

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site later sacralized as the Ficus Ruminalis. At this location a she-wolf – or prostitute, depending on the tradition – famously suckled them and tended to them, before they were found by the shepherd Faustulus and raised to eventually become the city's founders.

In a similar fashion, in Virgil's *Aeneid*, the eponymous hero is provided safe passage down the tempestuous Tiber by its god Tiberinus. When safely ashore, the god delivered a rousing prophecy to the hero and his companions, assuring them of their ultimate victory in founding a great (Roman) civilization (8. 30–52). Additionally, the story of the soldier Horatius Cocles is another example of the Tiber's prominence in foundational stories, as well as its significance as a safe boundary. When the tyrannical king Tarquinus Superbus, who had been overthrown and exiled as the last of Rome's kings, tried to reconquer the city, his army had to cross the only bridge which permitted passage across the Tiber, the Pons Aelius. However, Horatius, who was a soldier in the army of Rome's newly established Republic, was determined to fight off the enemy troops in the middle of the bridge, so that it could be destroyed. In some accounts, Horatius then manages to swim to safety after the bridge is destroyed, whereas in others, he bravely sacrifices his life for his city. The Tiber features prominently in all accounts of the story, especially as a means of protecting the fledgling Roman Republic.

A Roman terracotta votive sculpture that was recovered from the Tiber, dated to the third or second century BC.

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In fact, in all of these foundation stories, the Tiber is intimately connected with Rome's founders and heroes. The mythology is, therefore, closely linked with the archaeological evidence, demonstrating how important the river was to Rome's earliest development and how it came to represent an icon of the civilization itself.

Expanding outwards

Beyond providing Rome's earliest inhabitants with an attractive site to settle, it was also one of the key means by which it expanded and developed into a powerful city-state. Not only did the river create a rich and fertile valley along its banks, but it also provided an early abundance of drinking water to the immediate populace (through springs and tributaries), and a route for trade and communication across central Italy and the Mediterranean Sea. Moreover, with the coast, 20 km downstream, behind a series of marshy lagoons, Rome was well protected from coastal invasions, but close enough to benefit from the nexus of trade between nearby cities and societies. The length of the Tiber inland also allowed it to trade more easily with neighboring peoples like the Umbrians and Sabines.

Furthermore, at the Tiber's mouth there were a series of salt pans that allowed early Romans to ship and sell valuable salt across the Italian peninsula. By the third century BC, the city had built itself a river port, which extended for almost a kilometre along the southern bank of the Tiber. This was about the time at which

A Genucilia plate of the Faliscan type that was found in the Tiber, dated to the late fourth to early third century BC, decorated with a painted female head. The Tiber, especially in Rome's later history, was one way the Romans got rid of their waste, but was also the subject of religious worship.

© Dan Diffendale / Flickr

A bronze statue, dated to AD 37, of Augustus dressed as the Pontifex Maximus. In antiquity, it was thought that the Latin for 'priest', *pontifex*, was connected to the Latin for 'bridge', *pons*.

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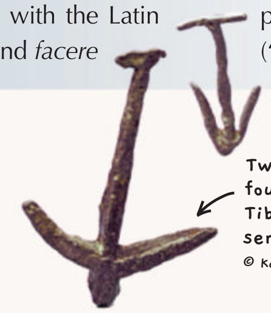
Pons and pontiffs

It has long been recognized that the Latin for 'priest' (*pontifex*) bears a close similarity to the Latin for 'bridge' (*pons*). This connection was even noted in ancient Rome. Varro, in his work *On the Latin Language*, connects the two words, noting how the priests were the first to construct the *pons sublicius* and were responsible for any subsequent repairs (5.83). However, in the same passage, Varro notes how Quintus Scaevola, the *pontifex maximus* after 90 BC, connected *pontifex* with the Latin words *posse* ('to be able') and *facere* ('to do'). Dionysius of Halicarnassus seems to agree with Varro, echoing his statement that priests first built the *pons sublicius* (2.73.1). Yet Plutarch doubts this connection (*Numa* 9.2). Writers in Late Antiquity would also favour the *pons-pontifex* connection.

Some modern writers have also favoured the connection, turning the etymology of *pons*, comparing it to cognates in other Indo-European languages. Others, however, have proposed it stems from Umbrian *puntis* ('offering') or from a lost Etruscan word.



Two lead miniature anchors found at the bottom of the Tiber in Rome, which possibly served as votive offerings.

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A view of the Pons Aelius. Built by the emperor Hadrian, it spans the Tiber near the site of his mausoleum. The Tiber was, first and foremost, a form of defence for the city of Rome, a boundary enemies would have to cross. However, as Rome grew more secure, more and more bridges were built across the Tiber.

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A marble statue of the god of the Tiber carrying a cornucopia and leaning over the she-wolf as she suckles Romulus and Remus. The Tiber regularly featured in the earliest myths of Rome.

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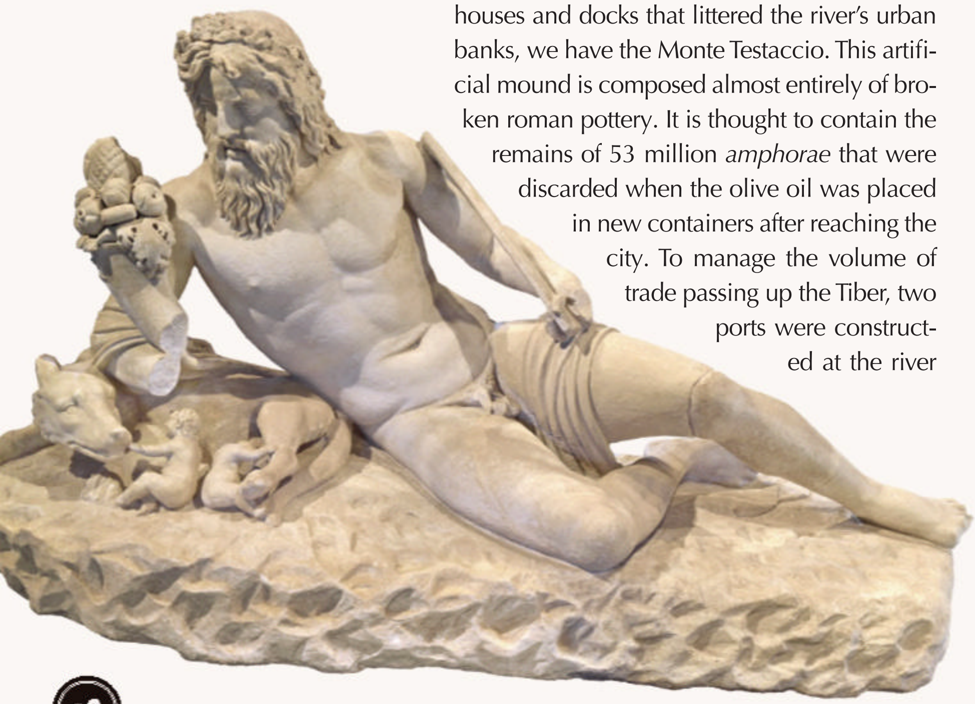
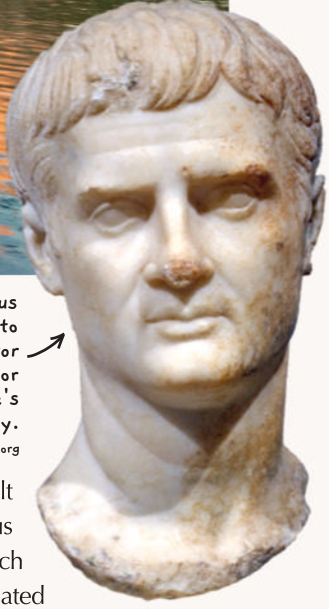


Rome's population continued to grow exponentially, as its trade and territorial conquests began to expand throughout the Mediterranean world. In time, the Tiber, with its direct connection to the sea, was to become a major waterway connecting Rome with a wide range of goods, including marble from Egypt, prized olive oil from Spain, wine and pottery from Gaul, and exotic luxuries from the east. All of these goods were allowed to flow up the river or be transported from its port near the coast at Ostia, right to the doorsteps of Roman citizens. As a lasting testament to the immense amount of such trade that arrived at the warehouses and docks that littered the river's urban banks, we have the Monte Testaccio. This artificial mound is composed almost entirely of broken roman pottery. It is thought to contain the remains of 53 million *amphorae* that were discarded when the olive oil was placed in new containers after reaching the city. To manage the volume of trade passing up the Tiber, two ports were constructed at the river mouth – Ostia was built by Claudius and Portus was built by Trajan – which had their own sophisticated bureaucracy and associations to tax and ship goods.



A bust of Marcus Vipsanius Agrippa, the first man to hold the post of *Curator Aquarum*, responsible for the management of Rome's water supply.

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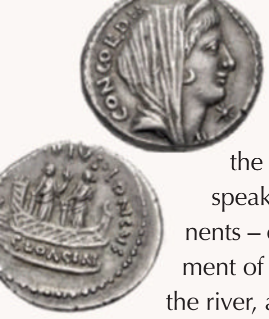
Aside from this, the Tiber also ensured Rome could dispose of its immense amount of waste. This was achieved primarily by Rome's ancient sewer system, the Cloaca Maxima, a complex system of pipes, tunnels, and open channels that mostly drained into the Tiber. Not only did it help dispose of the city's waste, but it also helped to prevent flooding by channeling rainwater into the river. So important was the sewer to Rome's urban infrastructure, that Cicero described it as "the veins of the city, without which, the life of the city would cease" (*Pro Cestio* 62).

Since the river was evidently such an important but unstable element of Rome's early development, it makes sense that an elaborate system of maintenance was needed to ensure a positive and symbiotic relationship with



A denarius issued by Lucius Mussidius Longus, ca. 42 BC, depicting Concordia on the obverse and the shrine of Venus Cloacina – Venus of the Sewers – on the reverse.

© Classical Numismatics Group

the river was maintained. Broadly speaking, this had two major components – one being the religious appeasement of the gods and deities linked with the river, and the other being the practical management of its banks and flow.

Propitiating the river

The Tiber was venerated as a sacred boundary and as the river god Pater Tiberinus. Many of Rome's earliest religious sites were also dedicated to springs and waterfalls, which would have connected to the River Tiber. These include the Temple of Fontus and the Sacred Spring of Juturna, both of which seem to have been extremely significant to Rome's early settlers who were anxious to demonstrate their gratefulness for the region's many water sources.

Yet the most important practice of propitiation towards the Tiber remained the Feriae Tiberinae (Tiber Festivals), which were held every year, in the middle of June. Whilst prayers were made to Tiberinus, the festival also featured the practice of throwing human effigies into the river, which have been variously claimed to have represented evil, the enemies of Rome, or even substitutes for prior human sacrifices.

Managing the river

Just as, if not more important to this propitiation was the actual maintenance and management of the river by the city's magistrates and officials. This took on a number of dimensions, but mainly included the management of the sewer, the management of the river's flow and its banks, and the maintenance of trade along large parts of its length.

With the creation of the office of *censor* in 443 BC, we have the first magistrates whose responsibilities included maintaining the riverbanks and its channels. After this point, we also – not by coincidence – have records of the number and severity of major floods. From the fourth century BC, the *Aediles* also played a role in the management of the river, especially in mitigating the effects of floods. Similarly, other magistrates, such as Praetors and Tribunes, could become involved in aspects of the river's maintenance, especially if issues encroached upon political or social matters of the city.

Under the emperors, however, and especially after a number of reforms by Augustus, the river's maintenance was to become more centralized around officials directly or indirectly appointed by the emperor. This included the *Curator Aquarum*, who oversaw the city's water supply and water management.

The eternal Tiber

It is clear how the Tiber played an absolutely essential role in the development of the Roman civilization. After the collapse of the Roman Empire in the west, the Tiber came to represent a permanent feature of an impermanent civilization. In the words of Petrarch, the Tiber "witnessed Rome's rise, and now stands as a silent reminder of its ruin". **AH**

Daniel J Kershaw – Historian writing for* Ancient History *magazine*, History Cooperative*, and* TheCollector*, and is also an Editor at Routledge Press.

A terracotta lamp, dated to the late first century BC, in the shape of a ship. The Tiber was a busy shipping route, with various vessels travelling up and down stream.

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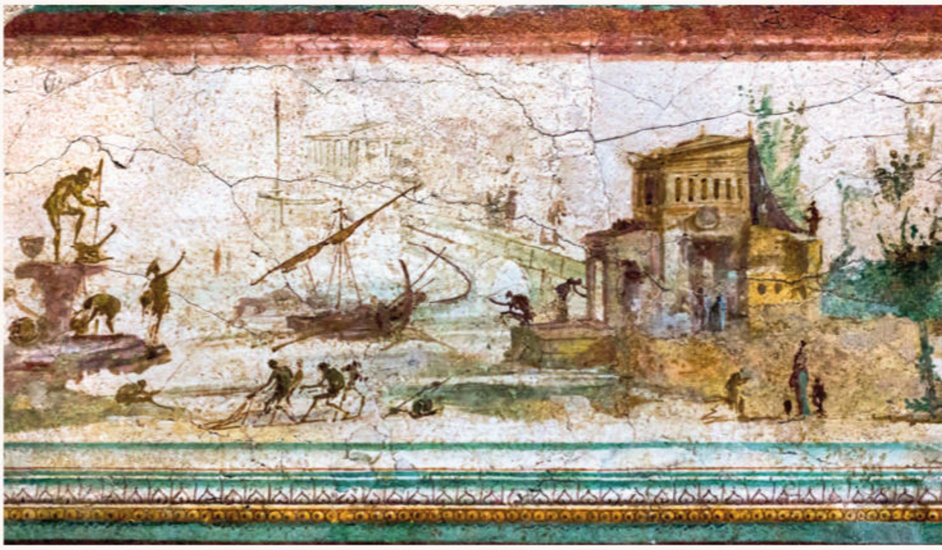

(Top) A fresco from the Villa della Farnesina, Rome, dated to ca. 19 BC, depicting an idyllic landscape with a boat on the river, as well as fishermen working their nets on the banks.

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(Bottom) A view of the artificial harbour of Portus located on the north bank of the northern mouth of the Tiber, that was first established by Claudius but later enlarged by Trajan. The Tiber was an import highway for goods, especially much-needed grain, and the ports were one way to properly manage the volume of traffic.

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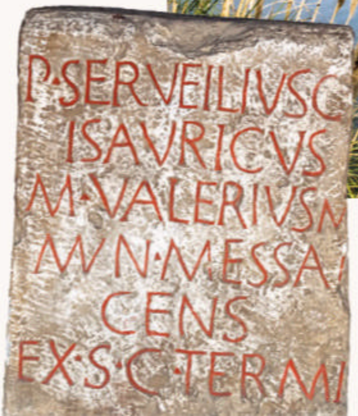

A Tiber boundary stone recording the names of the Censors Publius Servilius Vatia and Marcus Valerius Messalla Niger, who were appointed to manage the river's flow after a flood in 54 BC.

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A relief from the Column of Marcus Aurelius depicting Roman troops crossing the Danube, which appears personified here as a large, bearded figure. The river served as a border of the Roman Empire for much of its history, with the lands beyond it believed to be home to wild, nomadic people.

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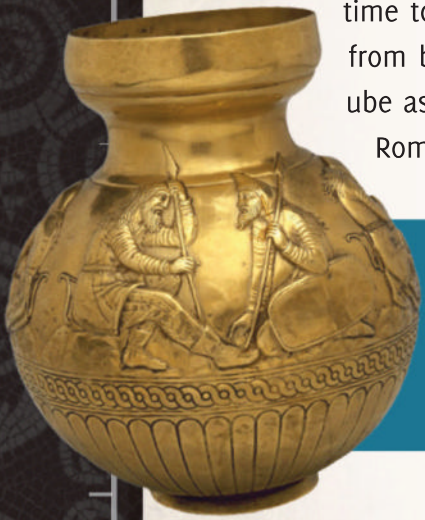
THEME

ROME'S FRONTIER ALONG THE DANUBE

ON THE EDGE OF CIVILIZATION

On a cold morning in the winter of AD 369/370, two boats approached each other from opposite sides of the lower Danube. From the southern bank came Flavius Valens, the Eastern Roman emperor; from the north rowed Athanaric, leader of a Transdanubian people known as the Tervingi Goths. After three years of indecisive fighting one another, it was finally time to make a deal. The choice to negotiate from boats was unusual, but using the Danube as the backdrop for the latest chapter in Rome's imperial drama was anything but.



A gold beaker from the Kul-Oba kurgan in Crimea. Dated to the fourth century BC, it depicts two Scythian warriors. Throughout antiquity, the various peoples living beyond the Danube were considered Scythians, regardless of their actual names or whether they conformed to the stereotypical image of the nomadic horsemen in Herodotus.

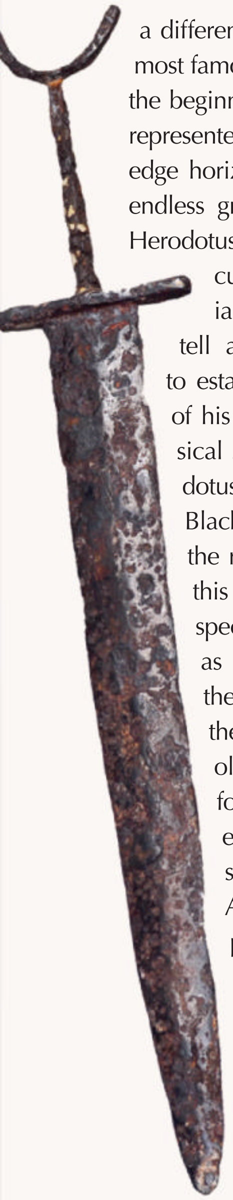
© The State Hermitage Museum

By Timothy Hart

For over three centuries, the great river had served as the visible symbol of Rome's domination, and as such, had borne witness to countless scenes of battle, negotiation, and imperial pageantry. On this day, Valens and Athanaric would strike a treaty of significant – if often misunderstood – importance, marking the beginning of the latest chapter in the saga of Rome's Danubian borderland.

So, why was the Danube such a useful symbolic marker for the Romans? Geographically, the Danube cuts through the heart of the Carpathian Basin. The region was home to tribes of Pannonians, Getae, Dacians, Thracians, and Celts. From the seventh century BC, Greeks began to establish trade outposts along the coast of the Black Sea, and finally, beginning in earnest during the reign of Augustus (31 BC – AD 14), Rome pushed inland from the Aegean and Adriatic, eventually establishing new provinces (Pannonia and the Moesias) with their outer edges at the Danube.

For the locals, the Danube was the heart of their world, but when Greeks first looked inland from the Black Sea coast, they brought



A Sarmatian sword, dated to the second to first century BC.

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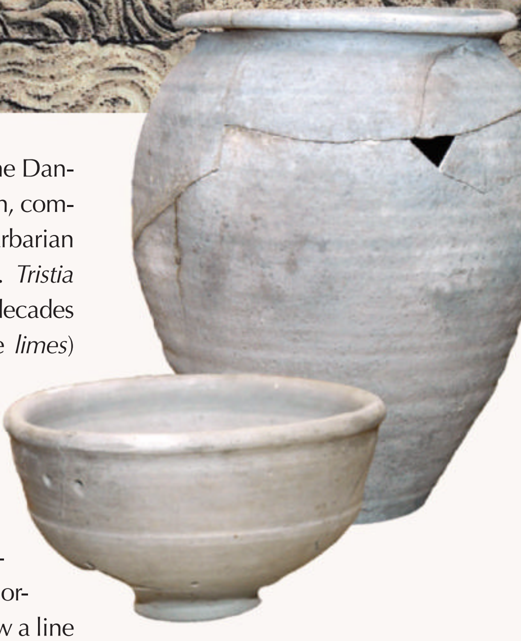
a different perspective. Greek ethnographers, most famously Herodotus, saw the Danube as the beginning of a land they called Scythia. It represented the outer ring of the Greek knowledge horizon in the north: an alien world of endless grass and strange nomadic warriors. Herodotus emphasized bizarre and inverted customs and climates in his Scythian *logos* (4.1–142), partially just to tell an entertaining story, and partially to establish these people as the antithesis of his own civilized culture (on the Classical Scythians, see *AH* 47). While Herodotus' Scythian heartland lay north of the Black Sea, he identified the Danube as the region's southern border. Over time, this worldview became the default perspective. While Strabo, who wrote just as Rome was tightening its grip along the river, pushed back against seeing the Danube as a divider of worlds, the older worldview endured and was ripe for the picking by Romans seeking to explain their presence along the river's southern bank during the first century AD. Early in that century, the Roman poet Ovid – then exiled in Tomis, near the Danube's mouth – described the Danubian borderland as the ends of the earth, complete with arctic climate and horrible barbarian raiders shooting poisoned arrows (e.g. *Tristia* 3.4.47–52; 5.7.13–20). Writing a few decades later, with Rome's military frontier (the *limes*) mostly in place, Pliny the Elder boldly claimed that "beyond this point, at the Danube, in general all the peoples are Scythians" (*Natural History* 4.80). As the Romans saw themselves ruling over peoples and cities, not territory, the Herodotean worldview was tailor-made to support Rome's decision to draw a line of control at the Danube. The peoples beyond the river could all be dismissed as Scythians.

War and peace along the Danube

Before the coming of Rome, Strabo described regular movement of people across the Danube (7.3.13). The changes Rome's *limes* brought, however, put the two sides of the river on very different trajectories. While the Roman provinces remained under urbanized compared to most other parts of the empire, significant cities did spring up both along the river and further inland on the major roads south towards the



Two examples of late Sarmatian pottery from Üllo, a town of Transdanubian people located across the river from the Roman city of Aquincum. From Aquincum, Roman goods were traded across the Danube. Roman pottery proved so popular that a 'knock off' industry developed across the Danube.

© Zello / Wikimedia Commons

A coin from Olbia, a Greek colony on the Black Sea coast, dated to ca. 310–280 BC.

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A view of the ruins of the Odeon in the Roman city of Aquincum. While the Danubian provinces were not as urbanized as other provinces of the Roman Empire, some cities still developed. These had a significant military presence, due to the frequency of raids from across the Danube.

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A bronze applique in the form of a bust of a barbarian from the Rhine or Danube frontier, dated to the late first to second century AD.

© The Metropolitan Museum of Art

Aegean world. The trade flowing in and out of these cities often caught the attention of Transdanubian peoples. Thus, incursions by raiders from over the river were fairly common.

Despite regular river patrols, the Roman *limes* system was never a preclusive deterrent to would-be raiders, particularly since the river froze over most winters. Instead, the system of road-linked towers and forts allowed Roman troops to quickly locate and interdict raiding parties after they crossed into Roman territory. Raids were usually small and handled by local military detachments, but larger raids did occasionally occur, usually prompting a more serious Roman response. During the winter of AD 85/86, the Dacian Kingdom, centered in today's Transylvania, launched a large raid into Roman territory, triggering a response from emperor Domitian, with fairly lackluster results. When Trajan came to power in AD 98, he quickly turned his eye on the Dacians, led by their ambitious king Decebalus. Two wars followed: first one of punishment (AD 101–102) and then, when Decebalus bucked against his new status as a Roman dependent, a second war of conquest (AD 105–106). Decabalus died together with his kingdom, and Trajan, surprisingly, opted to bring the Dacians under direct Roman rule. This posed a conceptual problem, because it meant ruling over a region and people previously considered part of Scythia. While the cognitive dissonance of governing a Transdanubian province never completely vanished, we can see Trajan trying to chart a path forward in the way his Dacian enemies are presented as a noble, organized people on his great monumental column.

A fresco from a Christian tomb in Viminacium depicting a hunting scene with horsemen, dated to ca. AD 325-450.

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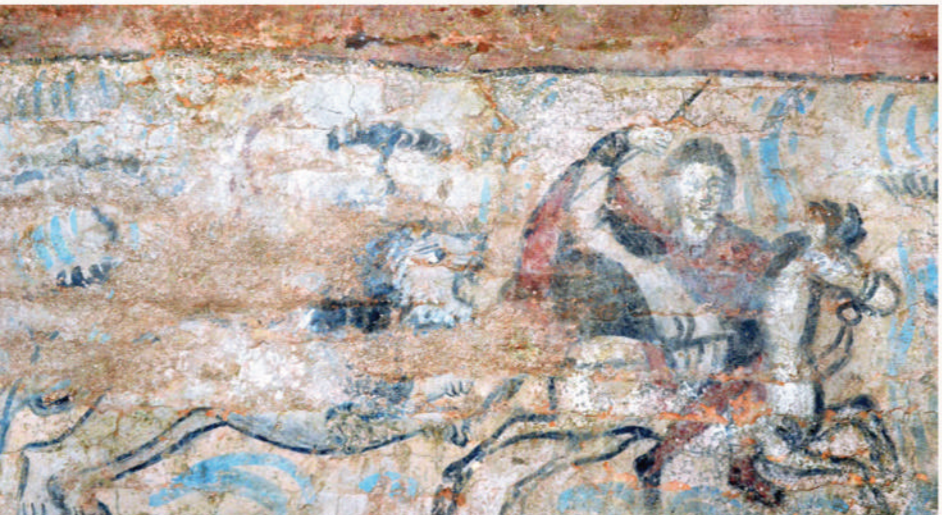

A partly-gilded silver fibula, dated to ca. AD 150–250, depicting the river god Danuvius, the personification of the Danube.

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A Danube fortress city

Vindobona – modern Vienna – was a major Roman settlement on the upper Danube. The earliest Roman evidence suggests that an auxiliary camp stood there as early as the reign of Claudius (AD 43–54). Around AD 97, a permanent legionary base was established, which served as a major logistical center during Trajan's Dacian wars. In AD 114, *Legio X Gemina* was stationed at Vindobona, and the site would remain its headquarters until at least the later fourth century.

Vindobona's civilian population outside the walls grew rapidly during the second century. At the same time, a Germanic settlement sprang up on the opposite side of the river: clear evidence that the fort functioned as an important nexus for trade north into Bohemia. During the chaos of the so-called Third Century Crisis (ca. AD 235–285), the troops at Vindobona were partially relocated, and the civilians quickly moved into the shelter of the half-empty fortress. During the fourth century, we have evidence for both habitation and craft production within its stout walls. Simultaneously, a new prevalence of Germanic grave goods in the site's large cemetery suggests that the city's demographics may have been changing as Transdanubian peoples began to settle south of the river. Yet, as Rome's grip on its Danube *limes* weakened in the early fifth century AD, the population of Vindobona also declined. By the time the region came under Hunnic domination in the 430s, the fortress was probably already an empty ruin, although the site was likely never totally abandoned. In time, a new city would rise there, one which continues to thrive to this day.

A sandstone face-pot found in the area of the urban settlement near the Roman military camp of Vindobona (modern day Vienna), dated to the second to third century AD. Originally founded as an auxiliary camp, Vindobona came to be a major fortress-city along the Danube, home to Romans and Transdanubian peoples.

© Diana Ringo / Wikimedia Commons

Dacia was an exception, and no Roman ruler again sought to annex Scythian lands. Marcus Aurelius' protracted Marcomannic Wars (AD 166–180), again sparked by raiding, aimed only to punish the rebellious tribes beyond the Middle Danube, and his mixture of military terror and economic warfare set the pattern followed in most later Roman conflicts along the Danube: first, destroy the enemy's ability to fight, then strike a treaty with a pliable local ruler, all the while funnelling as much trade as possible through Roman military *emporia*. The city of Aquincum on the river's west bank and the settlements established on the right bank by local Transdanubians attest a lively exchange of commodities, livestock, and finished products. Indeed, demand for Roman-style ceramics among the Sarmatians and Quadi east of the Danube became so intense that a local 'knock off' industry thrived at a nearby settlement, known today as Üllő, during the second and third centuries. Nonetheless, even as the Transdanubian plains became ever-more integrated into Roman economic networks, Roman writers and strategists continued to denigrate the region's inhabitants as worthless, destitute nomads.

Crisis and accommodation

During the third century, Rome was hit by multiple, interconnected crises. Succession wars and economic trouble at home were exacerbated by a resurgent Persian threat. To top it off, the Scythians were restless. Our scattered sources for the period describe annual, devastating raids across the Lower Danube and Black Sea. Chaos reigned in the countryside across Moesia, Thrace, and Anatolia, a situation captured in the *Canonical Epistle* of the early Christian writer Gregory Thaumaturgos, who decried the depredations of the invaders – identified by him as Borani and Goths – as well as his own people's participation in their raids. More traditional writers, however, such as Dexippus in his *Scythiaca*, continued to refer to the invaders as Scythians. Yet archaeology has proven Gregory correct. The peoples who raided across the Danube and Black Sea during

A plaster cast taken from Trajan's column depicting the Dacian king Decabalus committing suicide before he could be captured by Roman forces. Trajan, having pacified Dacia with Decabalus' defeat, incorporated it into the Roman Empire, the first and only time direct Roman control would extend beyond the Danube. The province was abandoned by the emperor Aurelian in AD 271.

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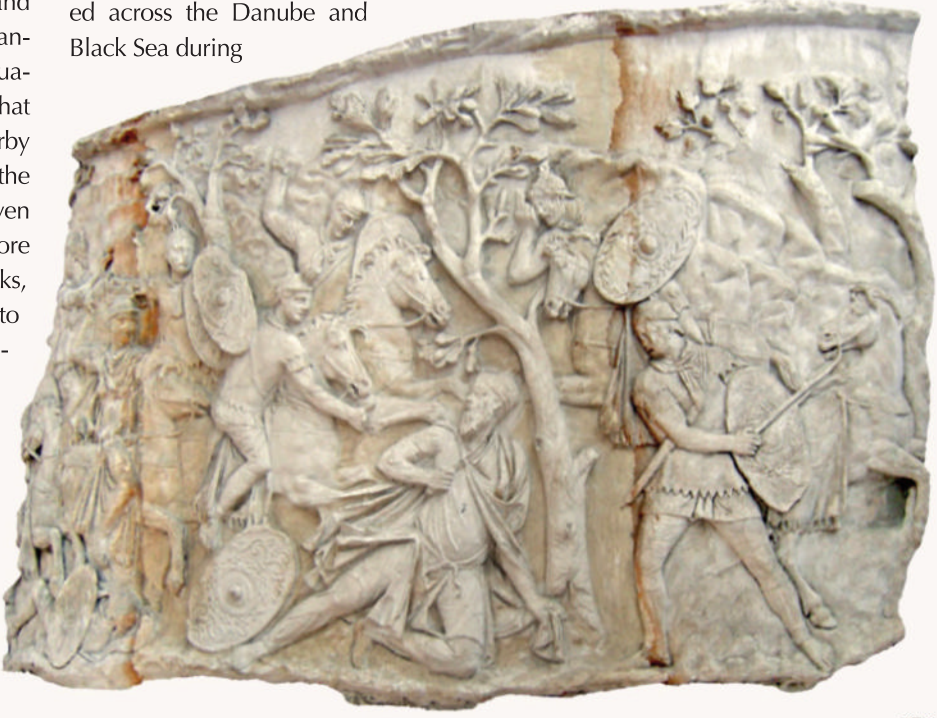

A relief from a Roman sarcophagus, dated to ca. AD 190. The scene is believed to depict a battle between Romans and Germanic warriors from across the Danube. Roman armies regularly crossed the Danube, often in response to raids by Transdanubian peoples, such as under Marcus Aurelius, who fought a protracted conflict against various Germanic peoples during the Marcomannic Wars (AD 166-180).

© Dallas Museum of Art

A Roman terracotta sculpture of a Roman eagle from the city of Olbia, originally founded as a Greek *emporion* on the Black Sea. It eventually came under Roman suzerainty, being incorporated into the Danubian province of Moesia Inferior. It was later abandoned in the fourth century AD, after being sacked several times during the Gothic Wars.

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the third century were nothing like Herodotus’ nomadic Scythians. We know these people archaeologically as the Sântana-de-Mureș/Chernjachov Culture: a sedentary, agricultural, multi-ethnic society coalescing from existing Sarmatian, Germanic, and Getic peoples in what is now Moldova and western Ukraine. These new 'Scythians' were expert sailors by river or sea, tended to fight on foot instead of from the saddle, and even managed to defeat Roman armies. They killed emperor Decius at Abritus in 251 and sacked numerous cities, like Philippopolis (250) and Byzantium (262). The Romans eventually managed to restore control, but not before emperor Aurelian was forced to evacuate Dacia (271). The abandoned provinces soon became home to people of the Chernjachov Culture. The Goths had come to stay.

A gold medallion depicting a portrait of the emperor Valens, dated to AD 375-378.

© Sandstein / Wikimedia Commons

During the fourth century, Roman emperors tried different methods to control their new Gothic neighbors. Constantine first defeated them beyond the Danube (332), then made peace and alliance with his erstwhile foes, including a proviso for free trade across the Danube. Thus, Constantine acknowledged the Tervingi Goths as the new, friendly inhabitants of Dacia and could claim he had restored Trajan’s old conquests, a feat he duly celebrated by adding ‘DACICVS MAXIMVS’ to his list of official titles.

A few decades later, emperor Valens found the Tervingi Goths much more difficult to manage. As a militarily-inexperienced ruler seeking to prove his legitimacy as the eastern head of a new dynasty, Valens provoked a war with the Goths in 367. Unlike Constantine, however, Valens was unable to win a decisive battle during three years of campaigning north of the Danube. With military victory elusive, the emperor struck his famous mid-river treaty instead. That Valens failed to force his Gothic counterpart to cross the river reveals the weakness of his position, but the emperor still held one powerful card up his sleeve: economic sanctions. In the past, Roman emperors had successfully closed the emporia along the Danube to weaken hostile neighbors, and Valens now followed suit. In the words of his court orator, Themistius, Valens turned the Danube limes into an “adamantine wall” (*Orations* 10.136c–d) designed to cut the Tervingi off from Roman commerce as much as possible. Valens surely hoped that his embargo would soon have the Tervingi begging for a return of the Roman goods they had come to expect. The emperor’s sanctions appear to have worked, but the ultimate fallout would prove devastating for everyone involved, including Valens himself.

Ammianus Marcellinus describes the period after Valens’ war as one of chaos beyond the Danube. In his version, it all started with the Huns. As these new, terrifying nomads moved west, the historian explains, they pushed other groups ahead of them, causing a chain-reaction which eventually prompted the Tervingi to seek resettlement inside the empire (31.3.1–2). Instead of blaming the Huns, however, we should look to Valens. When he closed the Danube markets, Valens

A Roman bead necklace from Marcianopolis, a city founded by Trajan in AD 106 after the Second Dacian War.

© Vassia Atanassova / Wikimedia Commons

cut off the Tervingi elite from the Roman goods they relied on to maintain their authority, but worse, he closed the main market for Tervingi goods (mostly agriculture, livestock, and slaves), thereby fatally undermining the broader local economy. Social disruption spread north to the Greuthungi Goths, then on into the western steppe, provoking increased raids by opportunistic Alans and Huns, who themselves must have been feeling the second- or third-hand effects of the trade embargo.

The tragedy's final acts are well known. In 376, Valens allowed the Tervingi to cross the Danube on condition that they serve Rome as dependent *laeti*, similar to how their ancestors had provided Constantine with troops for his various campaigns. Once across the river, however, Valens' generals first tried to neuter the Tervingi by withholding provisions and separating the men from their families. Later, they attempted to assassinate the Gothic leaders at a sham banquet, sparking a riot which quickly grew and spread into a full-scale rebellion. Bands of Greuthungi soon joined them, and even some Roman provincials. In the face of this unfolding disaster, Valens took the field with the cream of the eastern field army and met the Goths outside the city of Adrianople. It was expected to be an easy victory, but when the dust had settled, Valens was dead along with much of his army (see Dahm, *Ancient Warfare* XVI.3). It would take several more years before emperor Theodosius could finally restore peace to the region by granting the Goths the very settlement plan they had originally requested.

The immortal Danube frontier

After the Gothic disaster, it was not long before Attila effectively demolished the Danube *limes* as a meaningful frontier. Rome never gave up on the Danube as the proper edge of their empire, however, and after the demise of Attila in AD 453, the empire even managed to restore military control over the old *limes* for a time. Control of the river eventually lapsed for good during the early middle ages, but the idea of the Danube as the proper edge of the Roman world endured long after. **AH**

Timothy Hart is Lecturer of History at the University of Massachusetts Amherst, focusing on the social history of Roman borderlands.

(Top) The silver *missorium* of Theodosius I, believed to have been created in AD 388 to commemorate the tenth year of his reign. Theodosius I was able to end the war against the Goths in the fourth century by granting them the concessions they originally asked for.

© Italica Res / Wikimedia Commons

(Bottom) The walls of the fortress of Belgrade in Serbia. The settlement, known as Singidunum in antiquity, was an important fort along the Danubian *limes* that housed the *Legio IV Flavia Felix* starting in AD 86.

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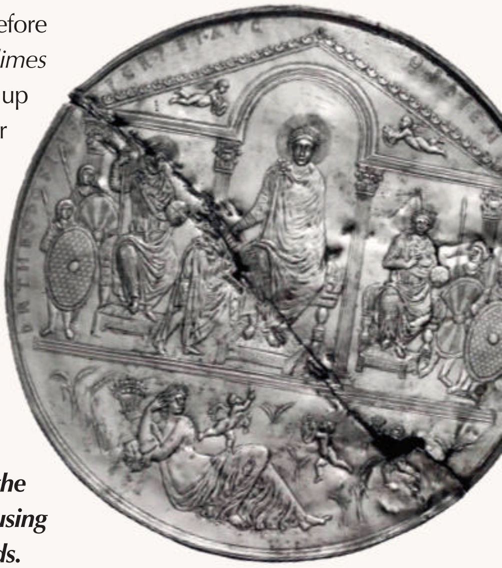


A Roman lead votive plaque, dated to the third century AD, depicting several figures associated with Thracian and Danubian religious beliefs, with Sol Invictus above all them.

© The Metropolitan Museum of Art

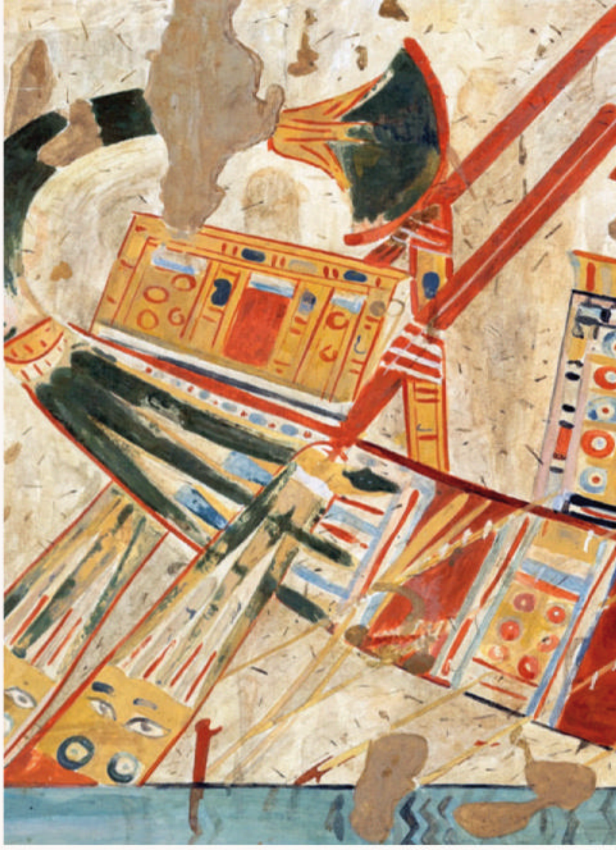
THEME

ROWBOATS, BARGES, AND RAFTS

RIVER TRANSPORT IN ANTIQUITY

Travelling along rivers, especially downstream, is usually faster than travelling over land, and more goods can be transported with less effort. In antiquity, from early civilizations to Late Antiquity, rivers were major transport links, and a wide variety of vessels were used to travel along them.

By Owain Williams

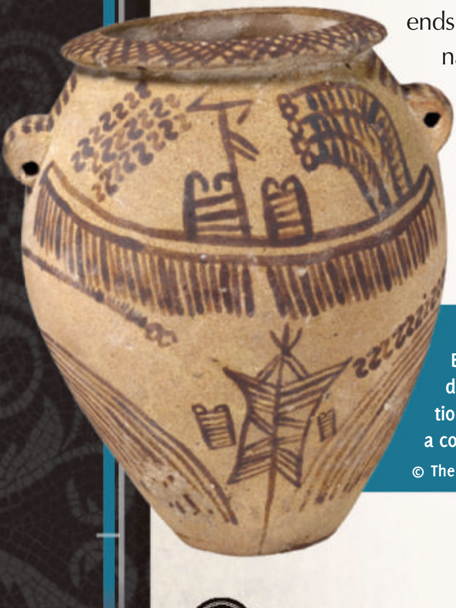


In the modern world, it is unusual to travel by water, especially rivers. There are, of course, river cruises, and larger rivers, like the Danube, still have large vessels shipping goods, not to mention smaller pleasure craft, but we tend, nowadays, to travel by land. However, in the ancient world, from the Tigris to the Tiber, rivers were packed with riverine craft transporting goods and people from one place to another.

The Nile

The most famous river from antiquity, by far, is the Nile. Stretching uninterrupted for 1200 km from the First Cataract to the Mediterranean Sea, the river dominated the landscape, and this is reflected in early art from the region. Nilotic scenes featuring crocodiles, hippopotami, and river birds are a common motif on Naqada I–II pottery from the early to mid-fourth millennium BC. Alongside these natural motifs, the early inhabitants of the Nile valley also depicted boats on their vases. These early boats, due to the short nature of wood native to the Nile valley, were made from papyrus reeds, which grew in abundance along the riverbanks. However, using papyrus meant that such boats were likely small, suitable only for short journeys, whether up and down or across the river to neighbouring communities, as they had a limited durability.

It seems that wooden boats were first used on the Nile in the mid-fourth millennium BC, as Naqada II pottery begins to depict boats with blunt bows and sterns, as opposed to the raised, pointed ends of reed boats. Due to the lack of useable wood native to Egypt, the wood needed to build river vessels had to be imported from the Levant, with the cedar forests on Mount Lebanon offering the most abundant source. This wood trade began a long relationship between Egypt and the various Levantine states, notably Byblos (see Kertai, *AH* 42), that would persist for millennia. As the wood was an expensive trade good, the boats made from it appear to have quickly taken on important social and religious connotations – Ra's solar barque is an obvious example. By the late fourth millennium, wooden boats were included in high-status Egyptian burials, possibly intended for use by the deceased in the afterlife, the earliest of which date to ca. 3050 BC from Saqqara. In the Old Kingdom, these burials came to be equated with royal burials. The most impressive of such boats is the barque of Khufu, a pharaoh of the Fourth Dynasty (r. ca. 2590–2560 BC), which was discovered in 1954 in a pit adjacent to the Great Pyramid of Khufu at Giza. While the boat was disassembled when it was interred, the planks bore marks that showed that they had once been fully assembled and used on water. When reassembled by archaeologists, the boat was over 40 m long. Over time, Egyptian boat burials gradually declined, and by the Middle Kingdom, small models of boats and their crews were interred with the deceased, although boat burials continued. For example, at the funerary complex of Senwosret III of the Twelfth Dynasty (r. ca. 1880–1840 BC) a number of 10-m-long boats were discovered in the late nineteenth



A jar from the Naqada II period, dated to ca. 3650–3500 BC, that is decorated with boats and trees. As the Nile dominated the landscape of northeastern Africa, depictions of the river, as well as boats and river animals, were a common motif in early Egyptian art.

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A faience scarab, dated to ca. 1419–1080 BC, depicting Thutmose IV seated atop a solar barque.

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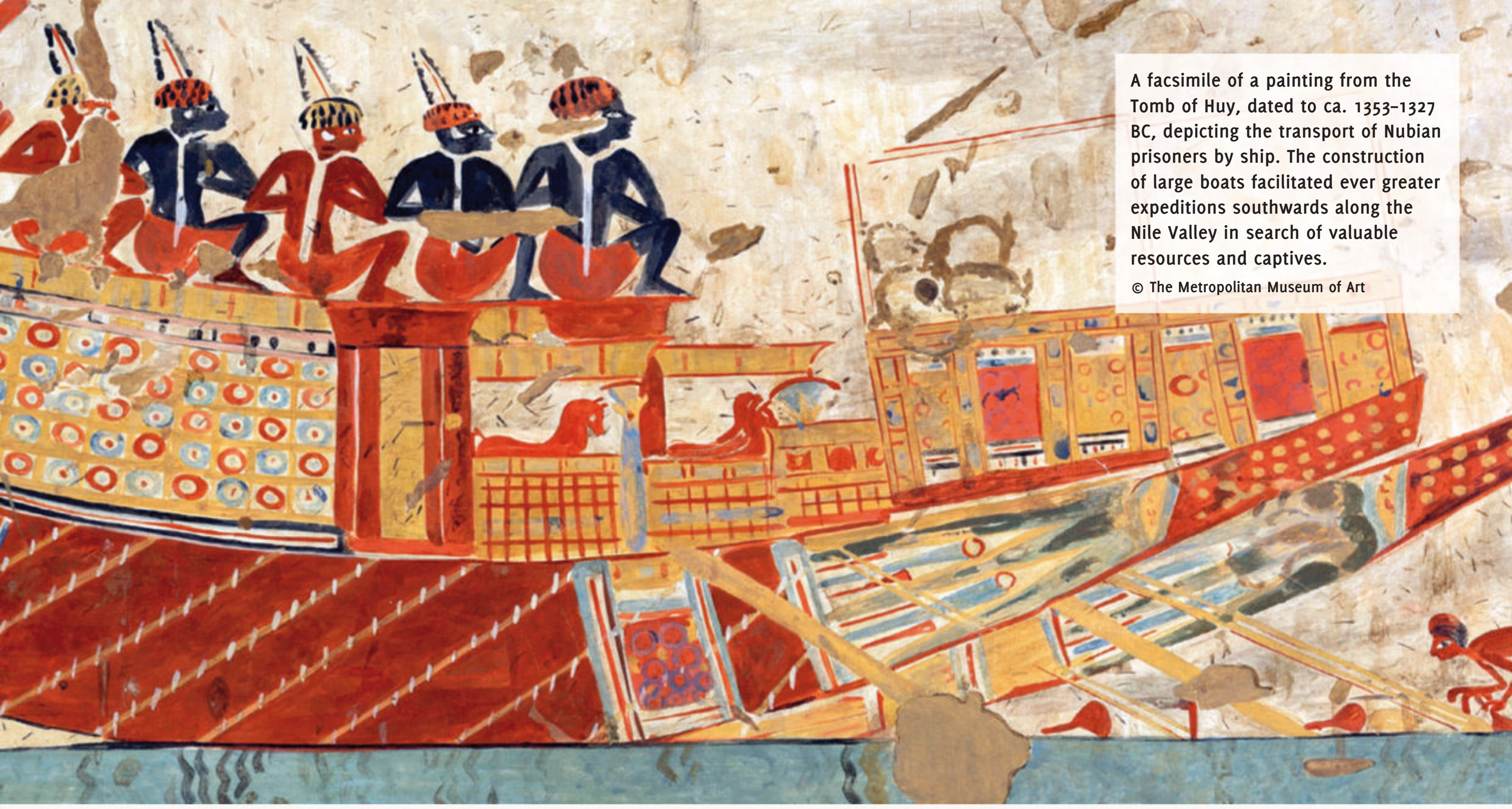

A facsimile of a painting from the Tomb of Huy, dated to ca. 1353–1327 BC, depicting the transport of Nubian prisoners by ship. The construction of large boats facilitated ever greater expeditions southwards along the Nile Valley in search of valuable resources and captives.

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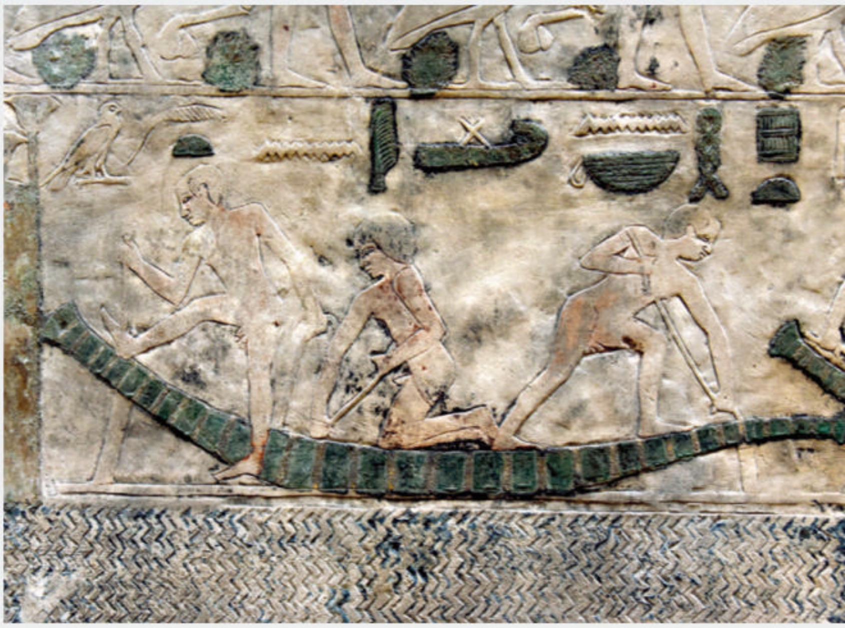
Papyriform boats

With the introduction of wooden boats in Egypt, even though reed boats likely became the mainstay of hunters and fishermen, they were initially made to resemble reed boats. When reed boats were made, the stern and the bow curved upwards, where the reeds were tied together. Early boat builders mimicked the shape of boats they were familiar with, and the stern and bow of early wooden boats curve upwards unnecessarily, as is the case with the barque of Khufu, for example, the prow and stern posts of which were actually carved to resemble papyrus bundles, not just their shape.

By the Sixth Dynasty (ca. 2350–2180 BC), boats started to be constructed with blunt bows and sterns, as well as flat bottoms. This change in boat design may reflect the increased use of wooden boats for practical purposes, as the new design allowed for greater space for cargo and for easier construction.



A relief from the Sun Temple of Nyuserre Ini at Abu Gorab, dated to ca. 2430 BC, depicting the construction of a papyrus reed boat. The earliest wooden boats copied the form of papyrus ones, with elements like an upturned bow.

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century. These boats, known as the Dahshur Boats after their findspot, were constructed using dovetail fastenings, which would have popped out when the boats became wet. Besides the fastenings, the construction method of the boats appears to have remained in use into the fifth century BC and beyond, as Herodotus' description of boat building in Egypt seems to conform to their design (2.96):

> *Of this tree (acacia) they cut logs of two cubits length and lay them like courses of bricks, and build the boat by making these two-cubit logs fast to long and close-set stakes; and having so built they set crossbeams athwart and on the logs. They use no ribs.*

Despite the religious significance of boats in Egypt, they were also important for Egyptian so-

An Egyptian model boat, dated to ca. 1981–1975 BC, from the Tomb of Meketre in Thebes.

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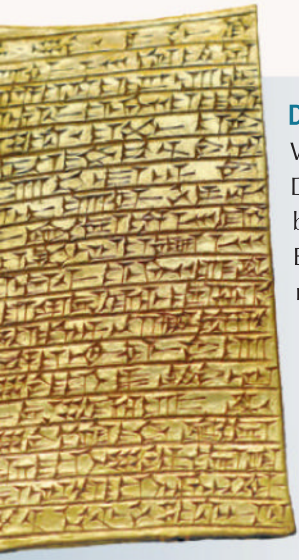

A gold foundation tablet from Dur-Sharrukin, dated to the late eighth century BC.

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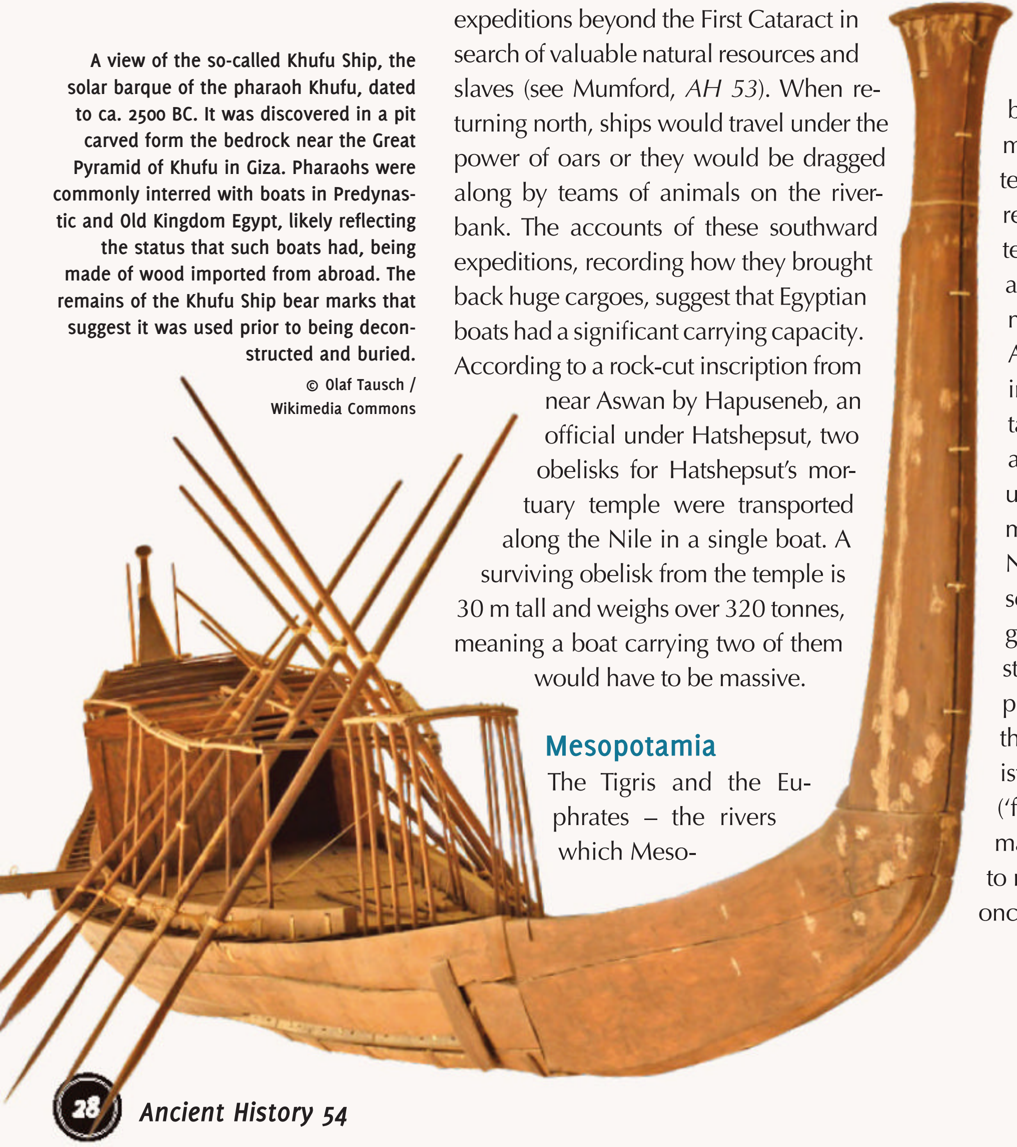
Dur-Sharrukin

When Sargon II wanted to construct a palace – known as Dur-Sharrukin, or 'Fortress of Sargon' – for himself, he had building materials shipping from all across the Assyrian Empire. Wood was floated downriver from the northern mountains, while stone was shipped on boats and rafts.

Thanks to the Assyrians' preference for writing on durable clay tablets, we have plenty of surviving correspondences from Assyrian regional governors who were responsible for the sourcing of building materials. Based on the reports in these letters, it seems that the riverine vessels used to transport the wood and stone were not of the best quality, with governors rushing to have them constructed. One vessel, which was transporting a *lamassu* statue to stand before the gates of the city, sank under the weight of its cargo. Another letter reveals that the men contracted to man the boats refused to board them, although it doesn't specify why. Perhaps they thought the boats unsafe?

ciety more generally. Indeed, travelling by boat was so common that, because the prevailing wind in Egypt was northerly, a ship with its sails raised came to be the hieroglyphic symbol for travelling south (*hnti*). Such southward-bound ships were the basis for various Egyptian expeditions beyond the First Cataract in search of valuable natural resources and slaves (see Mumford, *AH 53*). When returning north, ships would travel under the power of oars or they would be dragged along by teams of animals on the riverbank. The accounts of these southward expeditions, recording how they brought back huge cargoes, suggest that Egyptian boats had a significant carrying capacity. According to a rock-cut inscription from near Aswan by Hapuseneb, an official under Hatshepsut, two obelisks for Hatshepsut's mortuary temple were transported along the Nile in a single boat. A surviving obelisk from the temple is 30 m tall and weighs over 320 tonnes, meaning a boat carrying two of them would have to be massive.



A view of the so-called Khufu Ship, the solar barque of the pharaoh Khufu, dated to ca. 2500 BC. It was discovered in a pit carved form the bedrock near the Great Pyramid of Khufu in Giza. Pharaohs were commonly interred with boats in Predynastic and Old Kingdom Egypt, likely reflecting the status that such boats had, being made of wood imported from abroad. The remains of the Khufu Ship bear marks that suggest it was used prior to being deconstructed and buried.

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Mesopotamia

The Tigris and the Euphrates – the rivers which Mesopotamia is named after – had the same problem as the Nile: there was a distinct lack of useable wood for building river boats, meaning large boats were uncommon. Despite this lack of timber, however, river vessels were still common. Boat metaphors abound in Sumerian and Akkadian birth incantations, and a text form the seventh century BC attests to the association of pregnant women with boats, with a prayer from a pregnant woman declaring "I am a fully laden boat". The earliest known boat model from the Near East dates to the Ubaid I period at Eridu (ca. 5800–5300 BC), while several of Hammurabi's laws pertain to the construction and renting of boats, as well as legal provisions accounting for collisions.

Much like in Egypt, in southern Mesopotamia, as the rivers neared the Persian Gulf, reed boats were used – although they were likely coated with bitumen in Mesopotamia – but other river vessels in the region would have been unrecognizable to Egyptians. One such vessel was known in Akkadian as the *maskaru*, a coracle-like boat made of branches and coated with waterproof bitumen. The 'Sargon Legend', a fragmentary text dating to the seventh century BC that records the legend of Sargon of Akkad's life, tells of how Sargon's mother placed him in a wicker basket made waterproof with bitumen and sent him off down the Euphrates. Another such vessel is the *kelek*, or *kalakku* in Akkadian, a raft of inflated goatskins attached to a wooden frame. These rafts have a long history in Mesopotamia, being used up to the early twentieth century, when rafts made of up to 400 skins were used. Several Neo-Assyrian reliefs attest to their use in the seventh century BC, when they transported goods, including building materials such as stone blocks, along the Tigris and the Euphrates. A graffito from Palmyra, likely from the first to third century AD, attests to the existence of an association of *askonautopoioi* ('floating-skin makers'). Palmyrene caravans may have travelled with the materials needed to make these rafts, which they constructed once they reached the Euphrates, and then

A Sumerian inlay depicting a figure in a skirt carrying three fish, dated to ca. 2600–2350 BC.

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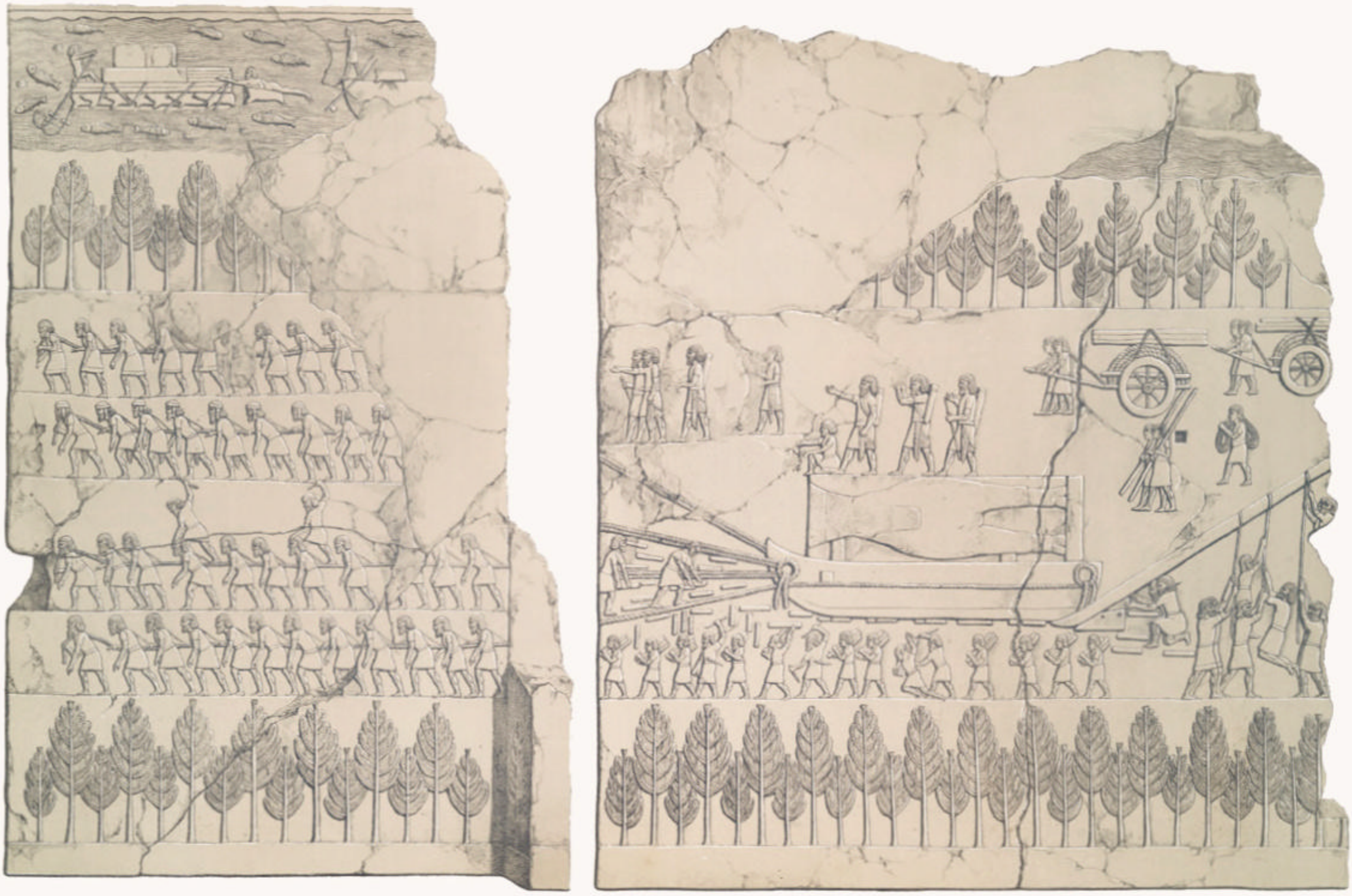

travelled south on them until they reached the ports at the mouth of the river in the Persian Gulf. The inflated skins did not need to be used as part of a raft to be a useable form of river transport, as famously depicted in an Assyrian relief of a warrior crossing a river while clinging to an inflated skin.

The rivers of the Roman Empire

The Romans were more than aware of the importance of rivers as routes for transport and transshipment. Geographers, such as Strabo, demonstrate a keen awareness of and interest in the riverine routes that crisscrossed the provinces, as well as bridges and fords. Columella writes of how a navigable river was an essential part of the ideal location for a farm (*De Re Rustica* 1.2.3), a notion shared by Cato (*De Agricultura* 1.3). Unlike the societies of Egypt and the Near East, ancient Rome had no major river along which it developed. There was, of course, the Tiber, which was used for transporting goods (see Strabo, 5.3.7), but it pales in comparison to the Nile and the Tigris and Euphrates. There were great rivers in the Roman Empire, such as the Rhine and the Danube, but these tended to be, primarily, the boundaries of the empire and transport routes second (on the Danube, see Hart, this issue). That said, there were far more navigable rivers throughout the Roman Empire, especially in the western provinces, than in Egypt or the Near East, which allows for a greater understanding of how important river transport was for people's day-to-day lives.

Italy is not known for its large rivers, which tend to be either too small or too fast flowing for boats or other river craft to travel along. There are notable exceptions, however. The most obvious example is the Tiber, which Pliny notes was more suitable for rafts than boats, although larger vessels, such as *caudicaria*, barges that were either towed along the shore or move under sail, could reach Rome (*Natural History* 3.9; see Kershaw, this issue). According to Strabo, the Ausar (modern Serchio) and the Arnus (modern Arno) rivers were somewhat navigable, but only for a short distance (5.2.5). Hannibal is said to have captured river vessels at Capua (Livy, 26.7.9), suggesting the city had a river port on the Volturnus (modern Volturno). In northern Italy, Aquileia was

A drawing of a relief from the palace of Sennacherib in Nineveh depicting the transport of a lamassu statue on a sled. In the upper-left corner, a smaller stone block is being transported by water; some of the crew use inflated animal skins as floatation aids.

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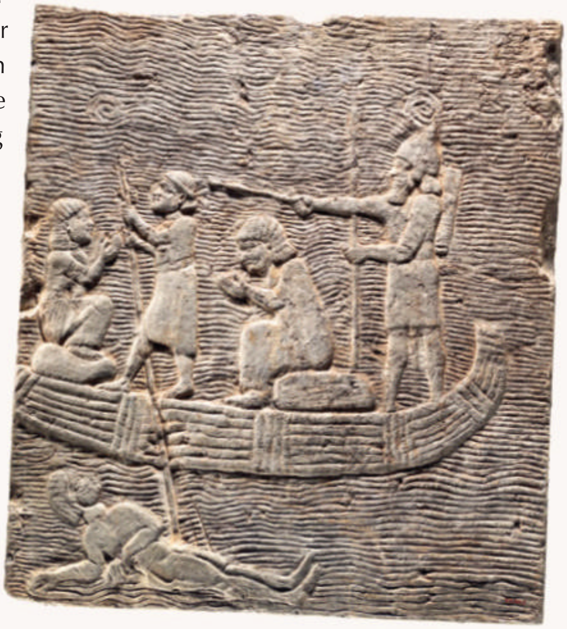

A relief fragment, dated to ca. 668–627 BC, depicting an Assyrian warrior escorting several prisoners on a reed boat. Much like Egypt, Mesopotamia lacked wood suitable for boat building. In the southern reaches of the Tigris and Euphrates, where reeds were common, reed boats were used.

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A bitumen model of a river boat from Ur, a city-state in Mesopotamia.

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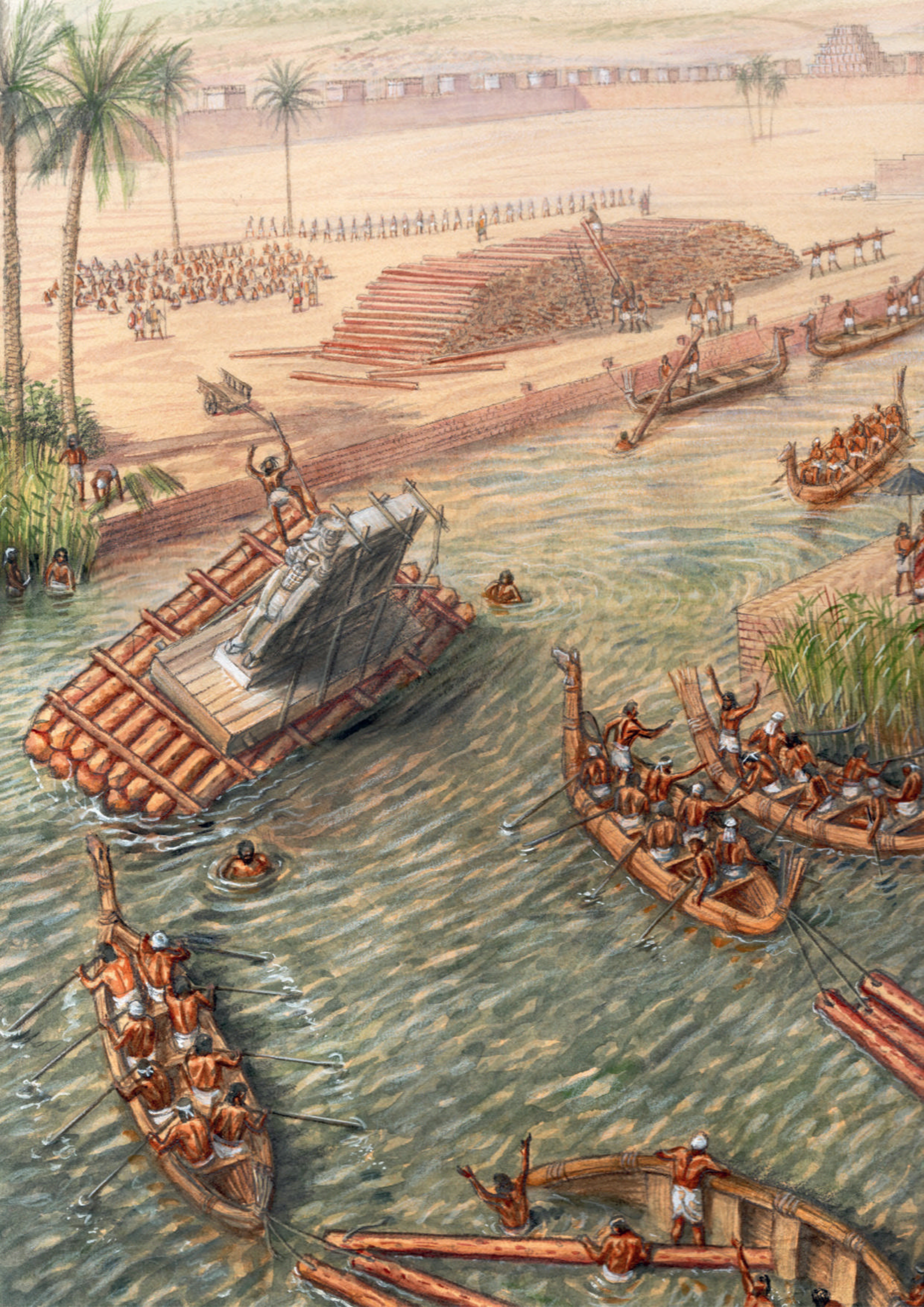

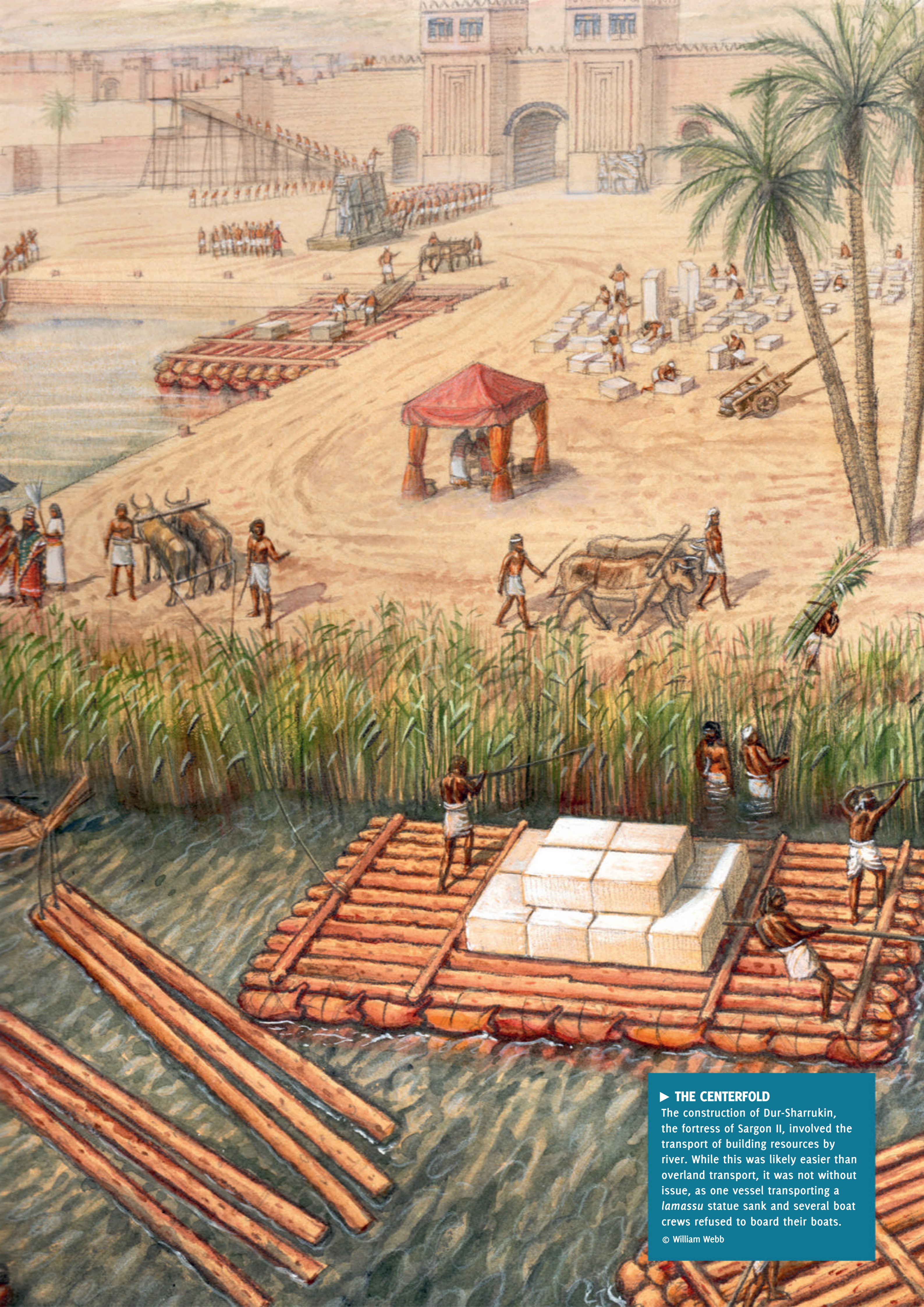

▶ THE CENTERFOLD

The construction of Dur-Sharrukin, the fortress of Sargon II, involved the transport of building resources by river. While this was likely easier than overland transport, it was not without issue, as one vessel transporting a *lamassu* statue sank and several boat crews refused to board their boats.

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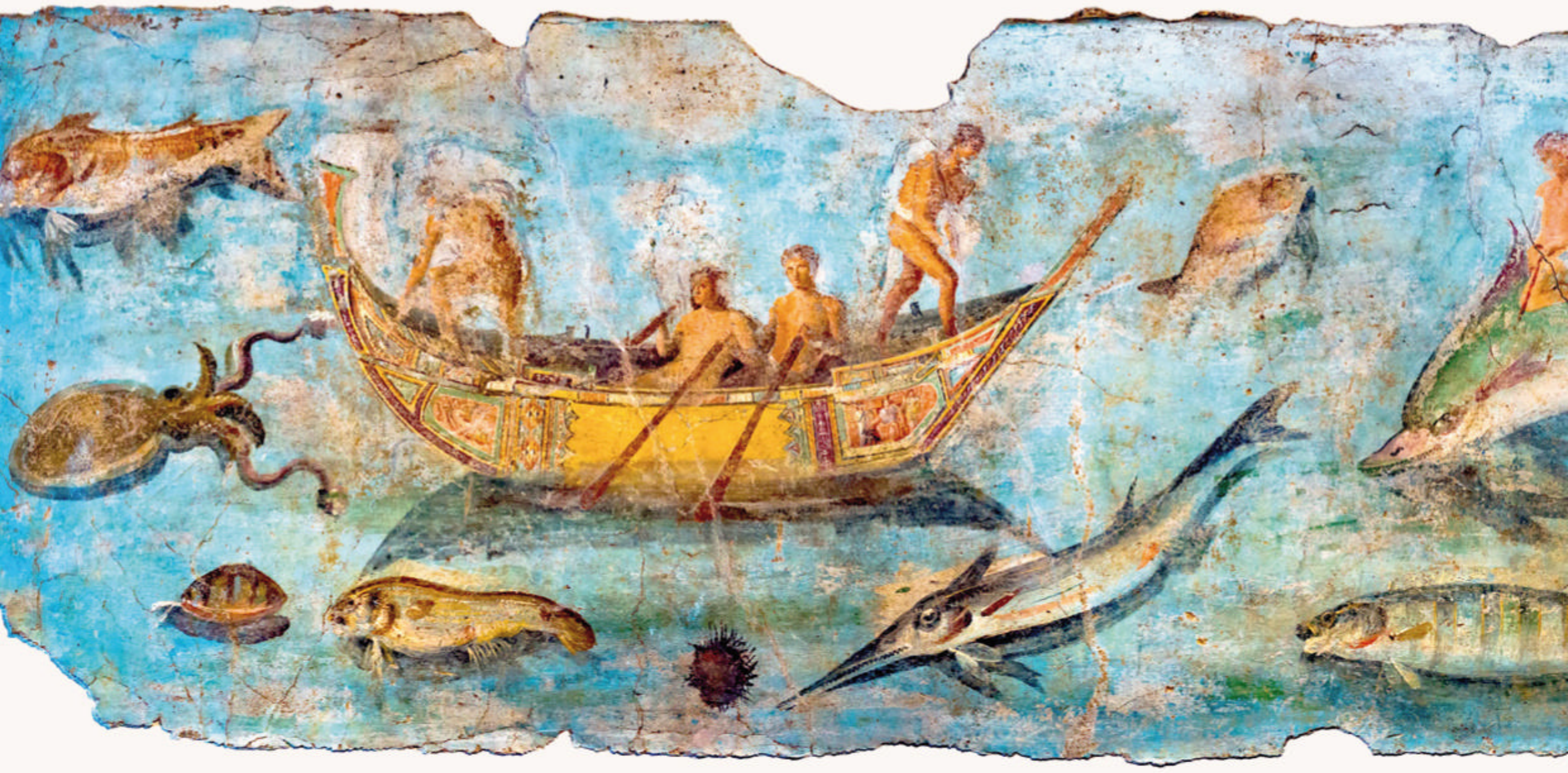

an important *emporium*, facilitating trade between the nearby Illyrians and seaborne traders, who would travel up the Natiso River (modern Natisone) for 60 *stadia* (Strabo, 5.1.8). The Italian river most famous for its navigability, however, was the Padus (modern Po), the largest river in Italy. Arising in the Cottian Alps, the Padus wound its way eastwards until it reached the Adriatic Sea. According to Polybius, the river was navigable for over 350 km (2.16), while Pliny the Elder claims that it was navigable to Turin (*Natural History* 3.21), even further than Polybius stated. Despite the fact that it is Italy's largest river, it seems that rafts were the preferred vessel on the river. According to Lucan, the vessels the Veneti used to travel along the Padus were made of plaited branches of willow covered with a stretched ox hide (*Pharsalia* 4.131–4), while Vitruvius records how larch wood was transported down the Padus to Ravenna on rafts (*On Architecture* 2.9.16). In addition to rafts, a type of river craft known as a *linter*, resembling a dugout canoe, was likely widely used, as 30 examples have been found along the river.

Elsewhere in the Roman Empire, rivers were also important. On the Iberian Peninsula, the river Baetis (modern Guadalquivir) was an important transport route. According to Pliny, the Baetis was navigable as far as Corduba (*Natural History* 3.3), while Strabo noted that smaller river vessels could travel beyond the city (3.2.3). It seems that many of the rivers in Baetica, not just the Baetis, were navigable (Strabo, 3.2.4). The river that captured Roman writers' imagination the most, however, was the Rhodanus (modern Rhône), which offered a vital connection between the Mediterranean and central Gaul, and possibly even Britain, as goods could be shipped from the Rhône overland to the Garonne or Seine and then on to

The remains of the western side of the port of Aquileia, a Roman city in the northeast of Italy on the banks of the Natiso River. Traders could travel up the Natiso River, which was navigable for 60 *stadia*, to Aquileia, where they could exchange goods with various peoples from the surrounding region.

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A digital reconstruction of the so-called Pillar of the Boatmen, a 5m-tall monument dedicated to Jupiter in the first century AD by a guild of Parisi boatmen in northern Gaul.

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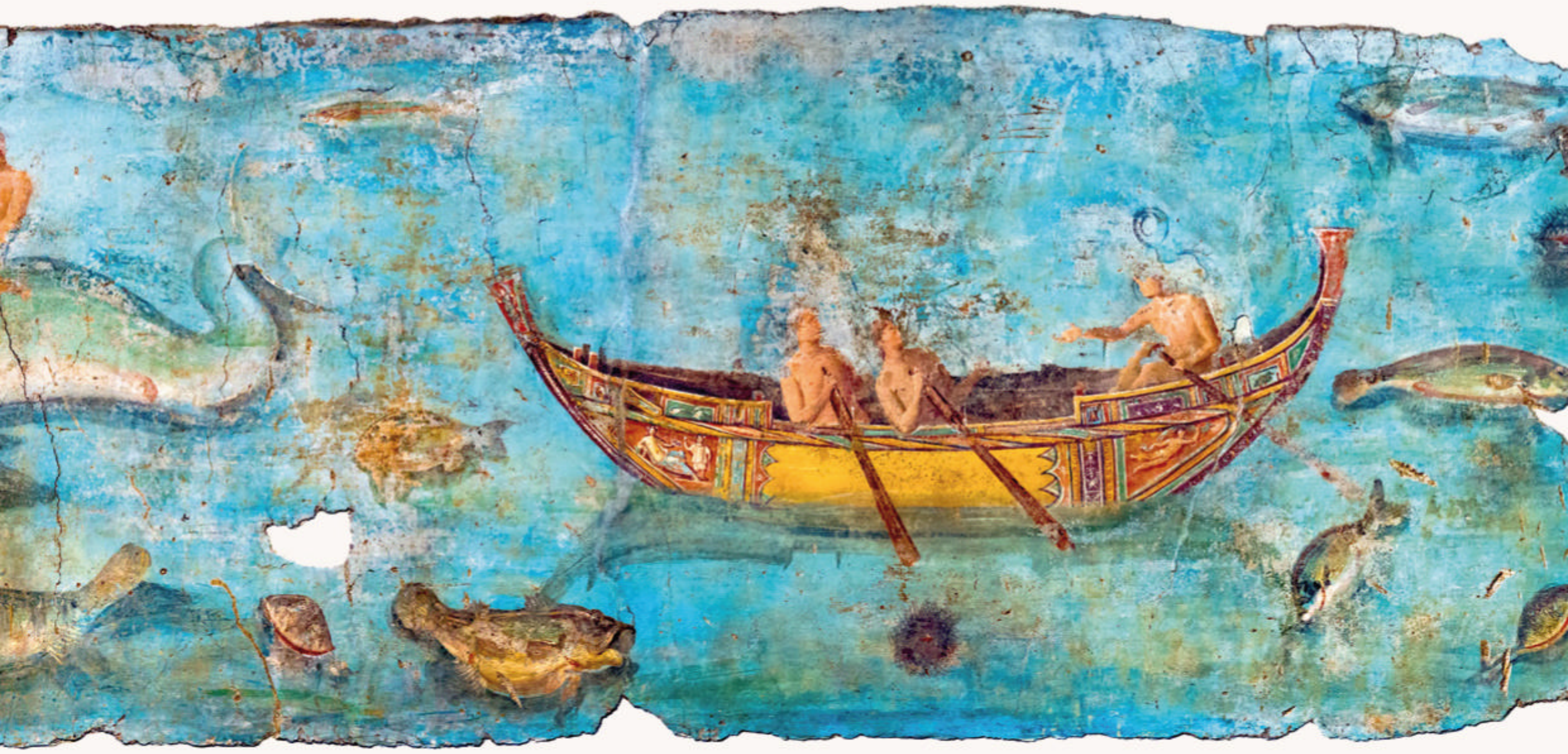

Bronze fibula representing a riverine warship, dated to the second to third century AD.

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the sea. The river was important even before it came under the Romans' control. The early Greek goods that have been found in central Gaul, such as the Vix Cauldron, likely travelled up the Rhône valley from Massilia (see Miller, AH 45). When Hannibal reached it in the late third century BC, Polybius describes how the river was busy with traffic travelling up and downstream (3.42). The Massilians are said to have introduced tolls on a canal that acted as an entrance to the Rhône, built by Marius, which was a significant source of revenue for them (Strabo, 4.1.8). Once Gaul became a part of the Roman Empire, Lugdunum (modern Lyon) quickly became an important communications nexus, sitting at the confluence of the Rhône and Saone rivers and roads through the Alps (Strabo, 4.6.11). Larger vessels could travel up the Rhône as far as Lugdunum, while smaller craft could travel even further upstream, as well as up the Rhône's many tributaries. Ancient writers attest to the use of oar-propelled *lintres* on the Rhône (Livy, 21.26.8) and the Saone (Caesar, *Gallic War* 1.12). The corporations of *navicularii* ('shippers') in Lugdunum, who could conceivably be both riverine and maritime shippers (the *navicularii* of Arelate had an office at Ostia), attest to the importance of Lugdunum as a trade hub, as do the many associations of *nautae* ('boatmen'), who likely were responsible for shipping up and down the Rhône's tributaries.

Rivers continued to be a core transport method in the Roman Empire throughout antiquity. Both Sidonius Apollinaris, writing in the fifth century (*Letters* 1.5), and Cassiodorus, writing in the sixth century (*Variae* 12.24), describe travelling down the Padus, for example. Rivers could, therefore, be considered the arteries of empire. **AH**

Owain Williams is the editor of* Ancient History *magazine.

A fresco, dated to ca. AD 125-150, depicting seven men in two boats, while another rides a dolphin, found in the building complex known as Pietra Papa, at the river port near the San Paolo gate of Rome. Pleasure boating was a relatively common pastime in the Roman Empire.

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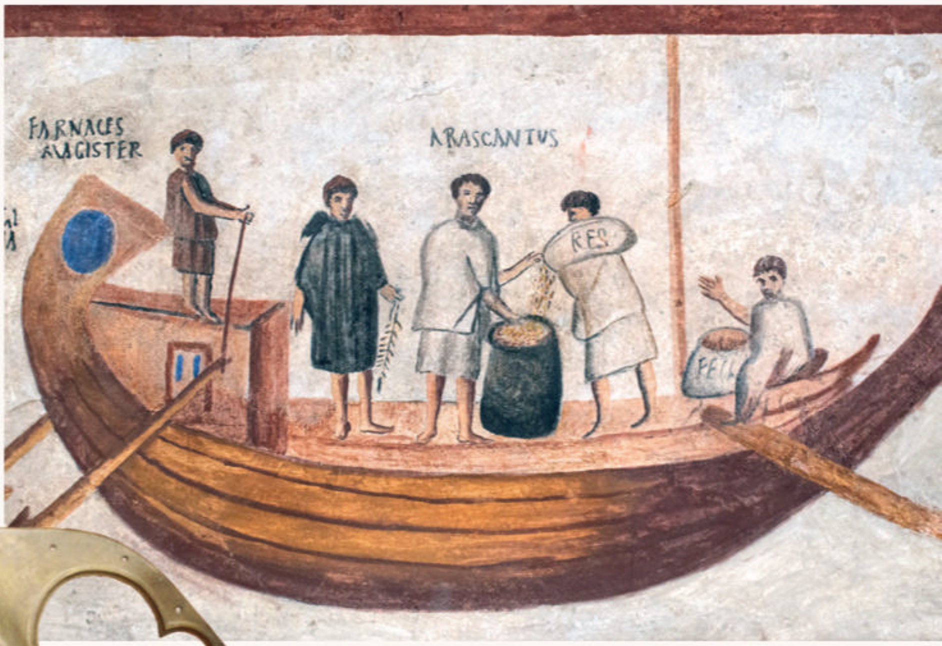

A fresco from Ostia, dated to ca. AD 200-250, depicting the loading of grain onto a ship named the Isis Geminiana. The ship was of the *caudicaria* type, which was designed for travelling along rivers.

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The bronze cladding of a wooden ship's rudder, which attached the blade to the tiller pole with sixteen rivets. Found in the Rhone river and dated to the third–first century BC.

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An aerial view of the River Thames near Reading in Berkshire, England. Rivers and other bodies of water were liminal areas in the pre-Roman Iron Age, which ancient Celts likely thought of as boundaries between the mortal and supernatural worlds.

THEME

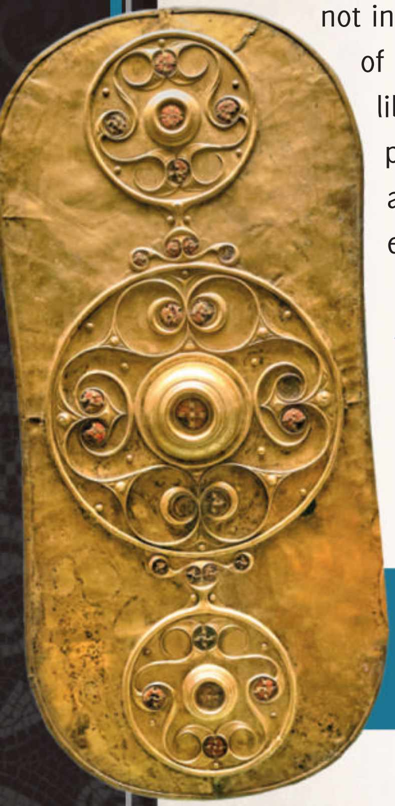
CELTIC VENERATION OF RIVERS AND LAKES

WEAPONS, WEALTH, AND BOG BODIES

By Ian Armit

The Celtic-speaking populations of Iron Age Europe are well known for their artistic achievements and exceptional metal-working skills. Yet many of the best examples of their work have been found, not in temples or the graves of mighty rulers, but dredged from the sludge at the bottom of rivers and lakes. These precious objects were not casual losses, but rather were deliberately deposited in the course of religious ceremonies. This veneration of watery places is of course by no means restricted to the European Iron Age, since rivers and lakes are held sacred in many world religions. Among the Iron Age Celts, however, they seem to have acquired a central place in religious practice and thought.

The River Thames, flowing through London, has yielded several treasures of Celtic art. Dredging of the river at Battersea in 1857, for example, yielded a spectacular bronze shield decorated in the distinctive 'La Tène' style; characterized by complex, swirling abstract patterns formed of curvilinear lines and curls. Another antiquarian find, from further east along the river, close to Waterloo Bridge, comprised a dramatic horned helmet, decorated in the same distinctive style. Both items, though redolent of violence and warfare, were made of thin sheet-bronze and had probably been produced as ceremonial rather than functional pieces. They had not been lost in the river through the chaos of battle, but had instead been deliberately given up to the gods in the last few centuries of the first millennium BC. Yet



The Battersea Shield, dated to ca. 350-50 BC, a ceremonial object that was likely ritually deposited in the River Thames. Bodies of water throughout pre-Roman Europe were sites of religious significance to the Celtic inhabitants.

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these spectacular finds form only a small part of the archaeological material recovered from the Thames and its tributaries. While much of what survives comprises metalwork of various forms, there have also been many finds of human remains, particularly skulls. Radiocarbon dating has shown that these skulls entered the river over a lengthy period, from around 1200 BC to the Roman period, but with a concentration on the pre-Roman Iron Age. Many showed signs of a violent death, indicated by blunt force blows to the skull. The frequent discovery of high-status items, weapons, and human remains suggests that the Thames was not just a geographical feature but held a central place in the social and spiritual life of Iron Age communities in the region, with a significance stretching back into earlier periods.

The Bann Disc, a ritual object dated to the first century AD, that was deposited in the Bann River in Ireland.

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Sacred rivers and springs

The Thames was far from unique. Many other European rivers show signs of similar histories of deposition. The River Bann in the north of Ireland, for example, has yielded numerous items of La Tène metalwork from along its course, including swords, scabbards, and spearheads. Perhaps the most enigmatic find, however, is a thin bronze disc decorated with a triskelion, or triple spiral motif, known as the Bann disc, likely made for ritual purposes. The stretch of the River Meuse at Kessel, in the Netherlands, has also produced large concentrations of human remains and weaponry, suggesting the existence of an Iron Age cult centre. As with the Thames, many of the human remains show signs of violent death, suggesting that rivers might be a location for human sacrifice.

The special role of rivers in ancient thought and religion is hardly surprising. Rivers both shaped and dominated the landscapes within which prehistoric communities lived and farmed. Prior to modern drainage, these active fluvial environments were avoided for permanent human settlement due to their vulnerability to flooding. Wetland areas around the major rivers often became effectively liminal places or boundary zones, set between the everyday world of houses, farms, and fields, and the supernatural world of gods, ancestors, and spirits. Offerings to rivers would have been made for a variety of reasons; perhaps to seek favour from the gods, to give thanks for a successful harvest, or – given the violent symbolism inherent in many of the deposits – to celebrate victory in battle.

In some cases, river deposits may also have formed part of elaborate funeral celebrations. The Iron Age communities of Britain and Ireland rarely buried their dead, yet they must

A Celtic horned helmet, dated to ca. 150-50 BC, that was recovered from the River Thames near Waterloo Bridge in London. The helmet is made of sheet-thin bronze, suggesting the helmet was not intended for use in battle, but for ceremonial use and likely deposited in the River Thames as an offering to a deity, possibly the god of the Thames itself.

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The bog body of Bellaghy

The most iconic of human remains deposited in watery areas are bog bodies. Thanks to the nature of bogs, the bodies deposited in them have been preserved in remarkable condition. The spread of bog bodies, both geographically and temporally, suggest such deposits were a common ritual practice across pre-Roman Europe. The so-called Emmer-Erfscheidenveen Man from the Netherlands, for example, has been carbon dated to ca. 1382–1134 BC, while the Gallagh Man, from Ireland, has been dated to ca. 470–120 BC. Incredibly, such bodies are still being found today.

In October 2023, near the village of Bellaghy, Northern Ireland, a body was discovered in a peat bog after police were alerted to the appearance of bones. When the body was first found, it was thought to be that of a teenage boy, but further study by an international team from several universities determined that the remains are actually those of a young woman, aged 17–22 years old, who died 343–1 BC. It has also been proposed that the woman was actually a ritual sacrifice. When the body was first discovered, despite extensive excavations and a ground-penetrating radar survey, the skull was not found. Cut marks have since been identified on her neck vertebrae, suggesting she was decapitated at the site of her deposition and her head was taken away. She may also have had her throat cut prior to this. Such practices were common throughout Iron Age Europe.

The remains of the so-called Gallagh Man, a 25-year-old who was killed ca. 470-120 BC. His body was then deposited into a peat bog in County Galway, Ireland. Due to the presence of a rope of twisted willow twigs around his neck, it is theorized that he was either ritually strangled as a human sacrifice or strangled as punishment for a crime. The deposition of bodies into bogs and other bodies of water was common throughout the pre-Roman Iron Age, from Ireland to Denmark.

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The Kirkburn sword, dated to ca. 300-200 BC, discovered in the town of Kirkburn on the edge of East Yorkshire.

© Daderot / Wikimedia Commons

The remains of a Roman flatbottom boat, dated to the second century AD, recovered from Lake Neuchâtel in Switzerland.

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have had funerary customs of some kind. One possibility is that bodies, or cremated ashes, were placed into rivers to be borne away by the current, much as we see in modern India, where the Ganges fulfils a similar role. Indeed, it may be that major European rivers, like the Ganges today, were perceived not just as physical bodies of water, but as deities themselves, with the power to influence human affairs. This was certainly the case for the River Seine in northern France, personified in the goddess Sequana, who was associated with purity and healing.

An important Celtic sanctuary dedicated to Sequana was established around the springs at the source of the River Seine during the pre-Roman Iron Age, perhaps during the second century BC. Initially, this was centred on a small timber shrine that probably held an image of Sequana herself, and formed a focus for votive deposits made by pilgrims in search of cures for a variety of ailments. The waterlogged conditions around the sanctuary have enabled the survival of a range of organic offerings that would otherwise have disintegrated on a dryland site. These include a collection of carved wooden heads, some of them presented in conjoined vertical stacks, that echo the deposition of real human heads into rivers elsewhere (on Celtic headhunting, see Armit, *AH* 48). Most of the material from the sanctuary, however, comes from the Gallo-Roman period, following Caesar's conquest of Gaul in the 50s BC. In the decades following the Roman conquest, the sanctuary flourished, with the building of new and extensive temple buildings. This period saw the deposition of numerous stone votives depicting a range of body parts including eyes, limbs, sexual organs, and even internal organs. Each represents a dedication to the goddess in the hope of healing specific disabilities and ailments. Latin inscriptions dedicated to the goddess also appear at this time, often awkwardly written as if by indigenous Celtic-speakers with only a passing knowledge of the newly-dominant language.

A reconstruction of a pile dwelling at La Tène, a Celtic settlement located on Lake Neuchâtel in Switzerland. The settlement, which gave its name to the later period of Celtic history and art, appears to have had a close relationship with the lake. Timber piers or jetties were likely built out onto the lake, from which people would deposit religious offerings.

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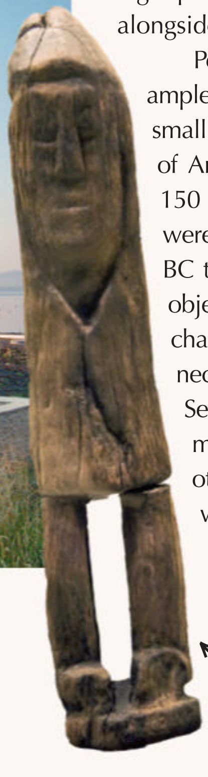
Lakes, pools, and peat bogs

The Celtic spiritual interest in watery environments was by no means restricted to rivers, but extended to encompass lakes, pools, and peat bogs. Among the largest and most significant of these was the site of La Tène in Switzerland, on the shores of Lake Neuchâtel, which gives its name to the second half of the Iron Age in continental Europe (ca. 450–50 BC), and to the dominant art style of the Celts. Excavations at the site of La Tène began in the mid-nineteenth century, before the development of modern techniques of excavation, and the deposits there are not well-understood. Yet the lake's relatively tranquil waters, compared to the strong currents of rivers like the Thames or Meuse, mean that large quantities of material have remained close to their place of deposition rather than being carried far downstream. At La Tène, more than 2000 objects were found incorporated into sediment accumulated on the lake bed. The range of objects closely mirrors that from rivers; large quantities of bronze and iron weaponry alongside human and animal remains.

Perhaps the most intriguing British example of lake deposits comes from the small lake of Llyn Cerrig Bach on the island of Anglesey in Wales, where more than 150 items of fine La Tène-style metalwork were deposited between around 300 BC to AD 100. Among the most striking objects from this site was an iron slave chain, more than 3 m long, with five neck-rings designed to secure captives. Several swords, spear-heads, shield fragments, horse gear, a war trumpet, and other objects were also recovered from what must have been an important



A votive offering of a figurine made of oak, dated to ca. 80 BC, and dedicated to Sequana, a goddess associated with the springs at the source of the Seine.

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The sanctuary in the Roman settlement of Aquae Sulis (modern Bath, England), dedicated to the British goddess Sulis, whom the Romans equated with Minerva, was a major religious site well into the Roman period. The hot springs were thought to have healing properties, and visitors to the sanctuary also deposited curse tablets addressed to the goddess.

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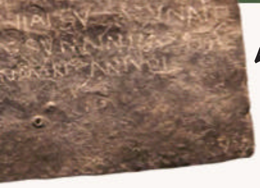

A curse tablet deposited at the temple of Sulis-Minerva in Bath, England.

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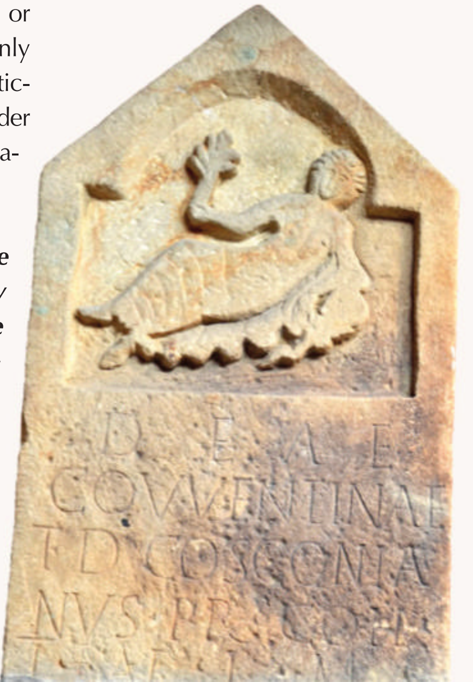
religious site with strong martial associations. Anglesey was later recorded by Tacitus as a stronghold of the Iron Age priesthood known as the druids during the first century AD, and his account may preserve some knowledge of the activities that occurred around Llyn Cerrig Bach. Similar, but even larger Iron Age lake deposits have been found in Denmark, for example at the site of Illerup Ådal, in Jutland, where around 15,000 iron weapons and other objects had been deliberately broken and deposited between AD 200–500. Such sites seem to represent the votive offering of war booty to the gods, and a similar explanation may apply to many of the individual weapon deposits found in rivers, lakes, and pools in other parts of Europe.

As with rivers, the veneration of lakes and pools did not cease with the Roman conquest of the Celtic world. Close to the Roman fort of Carrawburgh, on Hadrian's Wall in Northumberland, was a small shrine to Coventina, Romano-British water goddess, centred on a small spring. This deity, adopted and assimilated by Roman soldiers stationed on the northern frontier, was venerated with offerings including thousands of coins, small stone altars and inscriptions. But in addition to these conventionally Roman offerings were numerous other finds including animal bones and a human skull, redolent of earlier Celtic practices and beliefs. Perhaps the best example of the passing of indigenous Celtic beliefs into the Roman period, however, comes from the temple of Aqua Sulis in the Roman city of Bath in southwestern England. Centred around a series of hot springs feeding the River Avon, the waters here formed the focus of a healing sanctuary dedicated to the native goddess Sulis, equated by the Romans with their own goddess Minerva. Among the many finds retrieved from the waters was an extraordinary series of curse tablets – or *defixiones* – addressed to the goddess, mainly wishing evil on alleged thieves. For the Celtic-speaking communities of Britain, even under centuries of Roman occupation, the veneration of waters continued to run deep. **AH**

Ian Armit is an archaeologist based at the University of York. He is an authority on the European Iron Age and the archaeology of conflict and violence in its global context.

A bronze lunula plaque, dated to ca. 200 BC – AD 100, that was recovered from Llyn Cerrig Bach on Anglesey. It is one of over 150 metal items deposited in the lake.

© Wolfgang Sauber / Wikimedia Commons



An altar dedicated to the Roman-British Coventina, goddess of wells and springs by a man named Titus D. Cosconianus who served as a prefect in the *Cohors I Batavorum*. The British goddess was adopted by Roman troops stationed on Hadrian's Wall, with deposits at the sanctuary close to the Roman fort of Carrawburgh being redolent of earlier Celtic beliefs, suggesting some form of continuity into Roman Britain.

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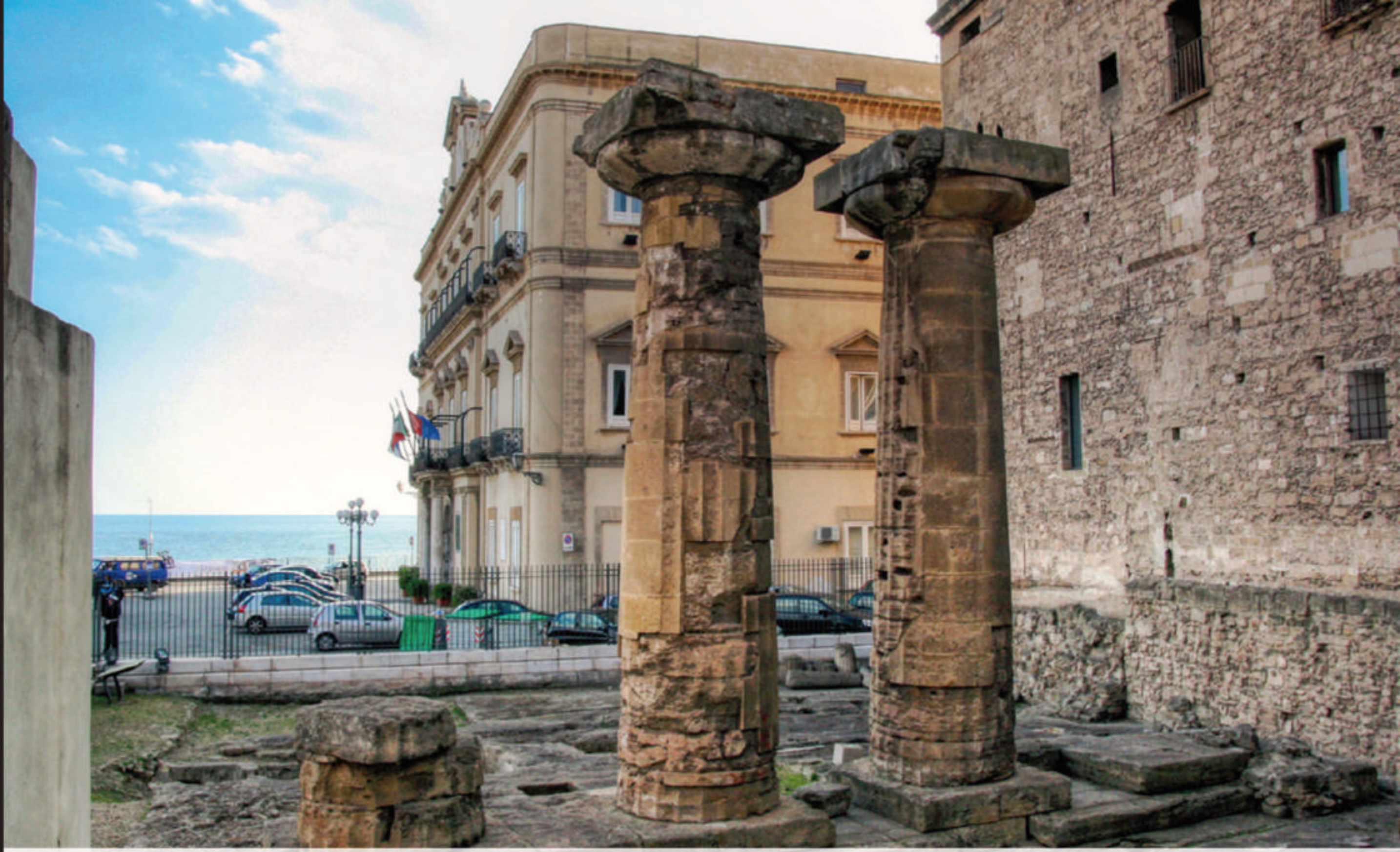

The remains of an Archaic Greek temple, dated to the sixth century BC, in modern Taranto (ancient Tarentum). It is the oldest surviving stone temple in Magna Graecia. Tarentum was one of the most powerful Greek colonies in Italy, but with obscure origins: surviving sources record contradictory versions.

THE FOUNDATION OF TARENTUM

SPARTANS & SLAVES

By Owain Williams

Tarentum – or Taras, as it was originally known in Greek, and today known as Taranto – was one of the most powerful Greek colonies in Italy. Founded by Sparta in the late eighth century BC, the city was famed for its wealth, harbours, and the size of its army. However, in antiquity, the proper identity of who was said to have founded the city was a matter of debate.

There are several accounts of the foundation of Tarentum. The main accounts are those of the fifth-century-BC historian Antiochus of Syracuse, the fourth-century-BC historian Ephorus of Cyme (both of their accounts are recorded in Strabo, 6.3.2–3), and the first-century-BC historian Diodorus of Sicily (8.21). They all roughly agree that the founders of Tarentum were disenfranchised subjects of Sparta, that they were willing to start a civil war against Sparta which was averted through the foundation of Tarentum, and that they were led by Phalanthus. Where the sources differ, however, is the social status of the founders.

A plaque from Tarentum, dated to the sixth century BC, depicting a procession of hoplites and cavalry.

© Dan Diffendale / Flickr

Spartans and slaves

According to Antiochus of Syracuse, the Partheniae – the most common term for the founders of Tarentum – were simply those Spartans born during the Messenian War. He infers that they may have been fathered by Spartans who, on account of not fighting in the Messenian War, were made Helots. Ephorus, meanwhile, claims that the Partheniae were sired by the youngest Spartans fighting against the Messenians, who were sent back to Sparta with the explicit aim of fathering children with as many Spartan women as possible. Aristotle, despite not offering many other details, does confirm Ephorus' version, noting how the Partheniae were sons of Spartans (*Politics* 5.1306b). Diodorus makes no mention of the founders' parentage, but he does call them Epeunactae as well as Partheniae. Theopompus of Chios, another historian of the fourth century BC, defines the Epeunactae as the children of Helots and Spartan women, who had coupled to replace the Spartan war dead during a war against the Messenians (quoted in Athenaeus, *Dinner Sophists* 6.271c). These accounts are so contradictory that it is impossible to find a middle ground among them.

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Ancient etymologies and propaganda

The problem for interpreting these different accounts is the fact that they seem to be a combination of folk etymologies and propaganda. The preoccupation of the sources with the parenthood of the Partheniae clearly demonstrates an attempt to explain the meaning of the name, which is often glossed as 'sons of maidens' or 'sons of unmarried women', after the Greek *parthenos*. Yet the proper plural adjectival form of *parthenos* would be *parthenioi*, not Partheniae. If, during antiquity, the true meaning of Partheniae was uncertain, the different explanations for their origins could, conceivably, be attempts to discern the proper meaning. After all, the ancient Greeks were very much interested in etymologies.

A bronze figurine, dated to ca. 520–500 BC, of a running Spartan girl.

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Yet the earliest source to discuss the Partheniae, Antiochus of Syracuse, may have used the uncertainty about the name to discredit the Tarentines, by connecting their origins to slavery. In the fifth century BC, Syracuse was in a long-running, on-off conflict with Rhegium, which had allied itself with Tarentum (Herodotus, 7.170). Given Anaxilas, the tyrant of Rhegium in the fifth century BC, had also broadcast his supposed Messenian heritage (Thucydides, 6.4), the Tarentines' own version may have included the Partheniae's connection to Spartans who did not fight against the Messenians. Antiochus may have introduced the notion that the Partheniae were descended from Helots, and that, therefore, Tarentum had been founded by slaves. With this in mind, Ephorus' subsequent account making the Partheniae, effectively, bastard sons of Spartans reads like a reaction to Antiochus' account. The fact that, in Ephorus' version, the Partheniae are meant to be the offspring of Spartans ordered to father more Spartan children, but are then not enfranchised – a choice which makes little sense – suggests that Ephorus (or his source) may have been constrained by the traditional narrative of Tarentum's founding, which needed the Partheniae to be disenfranchised.

Ultimately, this is all conjecture. We cannot say with any certainty which account, if any, has the right of it. All we can say is that the Partheniae were disenfranchised members of the Lacedaemonian community, that they were willing to start a civil war, and that this war was averted by sending them to found a colony. According to Tyrtaeus, there was some form of civil discord in Sparta during the Messenian War (Aristotle, *Politics* 5.1306b), so this version is not out of the realm of possibility. **AH**

Owain Williams is the editor of* Ancient History *magazine.

A relief from south of Chrysapha, near Sparta, dated to ca. 540 BC. The precise identity of the figures depicted in the relief is unknown, but they may depict Hades and Persephone or a 'heroized' warrior. In early Sparta, warriors' tombs were more decorated, such as with vases or decorated *stelai*, than later Spartan grave markers. This reflected the diversity of economic statuses among Spartans in the early Archaic period.

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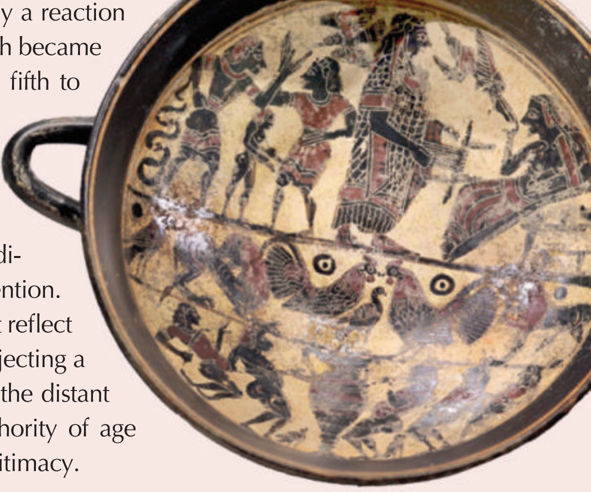

A Laconian black-figure *kylix*, dated to 540-530 BC, that was discovered in Tarentum. It depicts a man with a lyre standing before a man drinking wine on a *kline*. Unlike many colonies, Tarentum had a long, positive relationship with its founding city, Sparta, with the two cities even aiding one another militarily.

© Fabrizio Garrisi / Wikimedia Commons

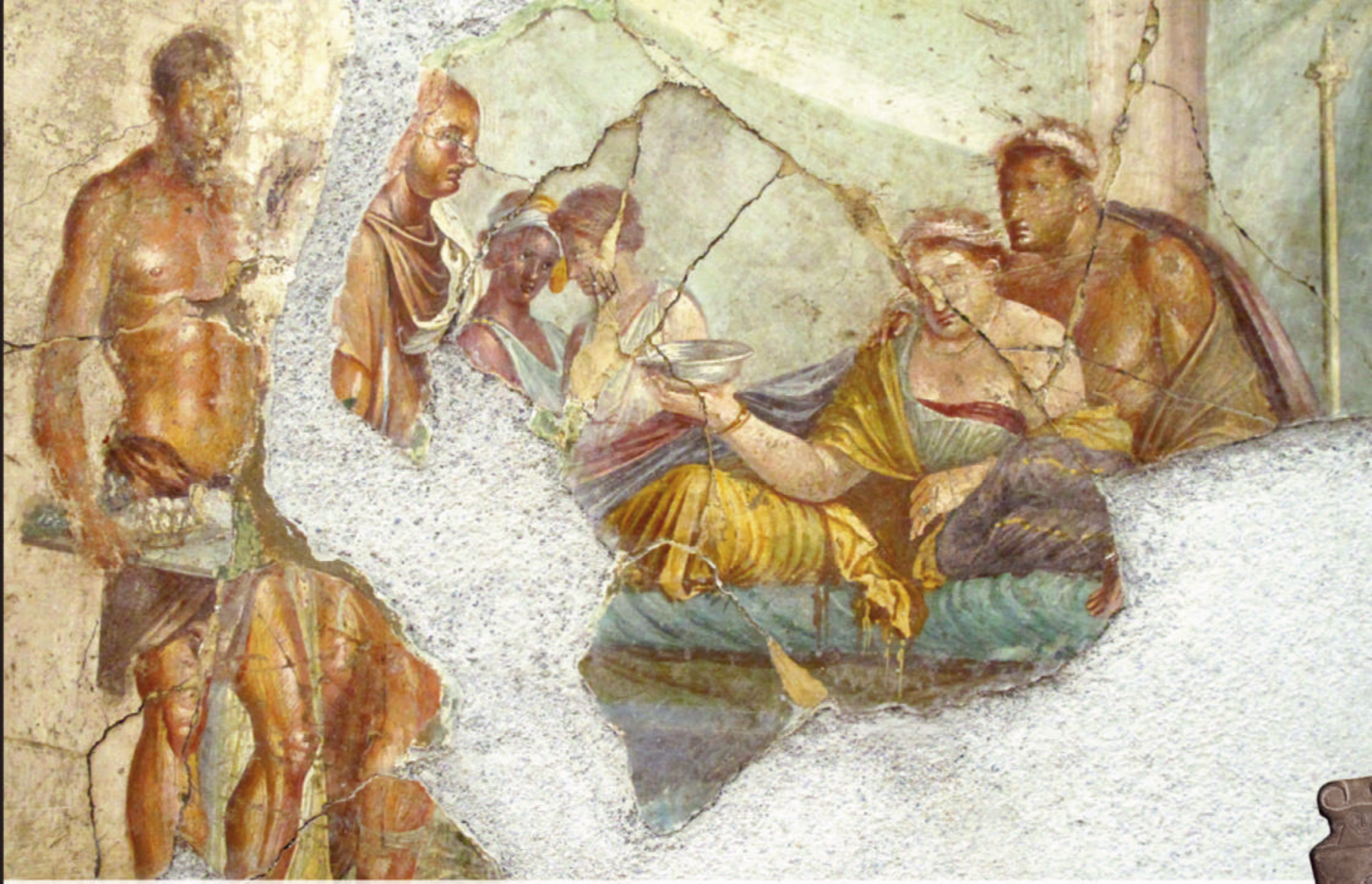
A Lycurgan tradition?

Ephorus' version of the Partheniae myth, in which younger Spartans were sent to father children with Spartan women they were not married to, resembles the Spartan practice of wife-sharing, as recorded by Xenophon in his *Constitution of the Lacedaemonians* (1.7–9). Notably, according to Xenophon, an older Spartan could bring in a younger Spartan, "whose physical and moral qualities he admired", to father a child with his wife; if a Spartan did not want to marry, he could father children with another man's wife, so long as he had her husband's consent.

Xenophon attributes this law to the legendary lawgiver Lycurgus, but rather than being an age-old law that governed Sparta for much of its existence, the law was likely a reaction to Sparta's citizenship crisis, which became increasingly apparent in the late fifth to early fourth centuries BC. Attributing laws to Lycurgus was one way which the Spartan government introduced new laws, by framing the law as a return to traditional mores and not a new invention. Therefore, Ephorus' version might reflect an attempt by the Spartans at projecting a contemporary development into the distant past, thereby granting it the authority of age and reinforcing the new law's legitimacy.

A Tarentine coin, dated to ca. 500–480 BC, depicting Taras, the hero for whom Tarentum was named in Greek, riding a dolphin on the obverse and a hippocampus on the reverse.

© www.cngcoins.com



A fresco, dated to the early first century AD, possibly depicting the death of Kleopatra. There were many variations of Kleopatra's portrait in antiquity, from Egyptianizing portraits to Roman caricatures.

POLYMORPHIC PTOLEMAIC PORTRAITURE

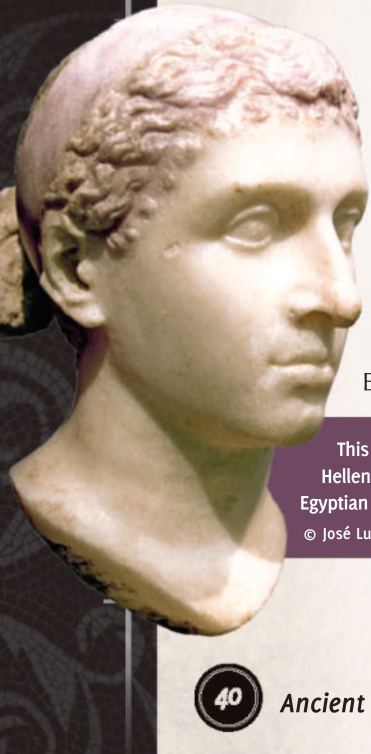
By Tara Sewell-Lasater

THE FACELESS KLEOPATRA

That Kleopatra was one of the most beautiful women in history is an established fact … right? Today, we see her likeness used to sell products, worn as a costume, and as a character in movies, TV, and games. The pervasive image of a sultry woman in a white kilt dress with an Egyptian-style collar, kohl-lined eyes, and a black bob has become the *de facto* representation of the queen in modern popular culture, one that is easily recognizable by audiences far and wide. Yet this representation of the ancient queen is a fantasy based upon the many misconceptions and fabrications that have attached themselves to her over the centuries.

The misperceptions surrounding Kleopatra stem from the Roman view of the queen, rather than the realities of her life or her Greco-Egyptian heritage. This is because much of the historic record of Kleopatra's reign was preserved for us by Roman authors. These writers were commissioned by Augustus to present Kleopatra as a blameworthy figure, since Augustus wanted to frame his strife with Antony as a war against the corruptible influences of Egypt and its ignominious queen, not a Roman civil war. The Augustan-era writers transformed Kleopatra from a powerful queen who skillfully ruled one of the greatest kingdoms of antiquity into a sultry, empty-headed sex-kitten who focused only on her own pleasures. Even the English spelling of Cleopatra is the Latinized version. The transliteration of her Greek name is Kleopatra.

This Roman view was then passed down through the ages, where it was expanded on in the literature of the Middle Ages and Renaissance and was adapted into the movies and TV productions of the modern world, creating the pop-culture caricature we have now. Although modern historians have tried to rehabilitate



This bust, dated to ca. 50-30 BC, is believed to depict Kleopatra VII in a Hellenistic style. Ptolemaic portraiture oscillated between Hellenistic and Egyptian styles, depending on the intended audience.

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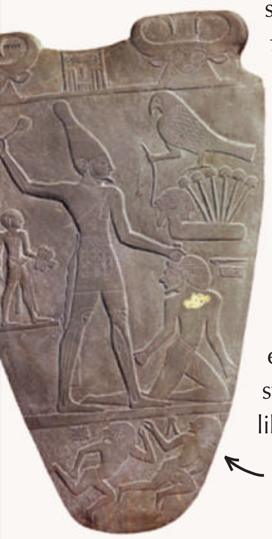
Kleopatra's reputation by sharing the realities of her reign, the image of the beautiful, seductive queen is the one most people recognize due to the much wider reach of popular culture.

One of the most common questions surrounding Kleopatra is: "what did she really look like?" Unfortunately for us, there is not a simple answer to that question because Kleopatra's depictions, even during her lifetime, changed depending on who was creating the particular piece and what the intended purpose was. The images used during her reign present certain recognizable motifs that would communicate specific religious or political messages to the viewing populace. Kleopatra was first and foremost a queen of combined heritages, being Greek in her dynasty and Egyptian in her rulership, so artistic renderings of her are found in both Egyptian and Greek/Hellenistic styles.



The 'smiting side' of the Narmer Pallette, dated to ca. 3200–3000 BC.

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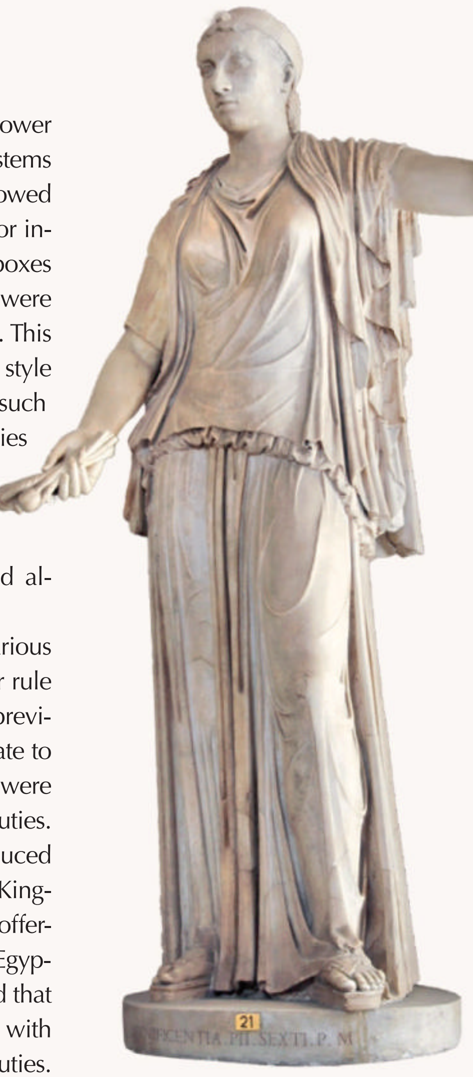
Egyptian Kleopatra

In Egyptian art, representations of the pharaoh remained fairly unchanged for over 3000 years. The earliest royal depictions, such as the Narmer Palette (ca. 3200–3000 BC), set the standard for Pharaonic ideology, like the smiting scene depicted therein, which emphasized the ruler's power over chaos. Due to the use of grid systems when producing art, figures uniformly followed certain dimensions and characteristics – for instance, in monumental reliefs, eighteen boxes were used for standing figures so there were set measurements for different body parts. This standardization of motifs and production style means that later images of the pharaoh, such as the relief of Ramesses III smiting enemies before Amon-Re at Medinet Habu (ca. 1160–1150 BC) are very similar to the Narmer Palette, even though the relief of Ramesses, for example, was produced almost 2000 years later.

The Ptolemies then adopted these various motifs for themselves to indicate that their rule was a legitimate continuation from the previous Pharaonic dynasties and to demonstrate to their newly conquered peoples that they were undertaking the traditional Pharaonic duties. For example, another motif we see reproduced from the Old Kingdom through the New Kingdom and into the Ptolemaic period is the offering of food, drink, or ritual goods to the Egyptian deities. This type of scene emphasized that the pharaoh was keeping Egypt in favour with the gods by completing his religious duties. For this reason, the relief of Kleopatra and her son Ptolemy XV Caesarion offering to Hathor on the southern exterior wall of the Temple of Dendera (late first century BC) is comparable to royal depictions we see from the New Kingdom – like the scenes of Ramesses II and Nefertari



Possibly found near the so-called Tomb of Nero along the Via Cassia, north of Rome, this statue is thought to depict Kleopatra, based on the appearance of the statue and its similarity to the portraits of Kleopatra on her coinage.

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Pro-Egyptian Ptolemies

Adopting Egyptian techniques and motifs for portraiture was not a new practice in Kleopatra's reign. It was only one of many tactics in the Ptolemies' arsenal designed to endear themselves to their Egyptian subjects.

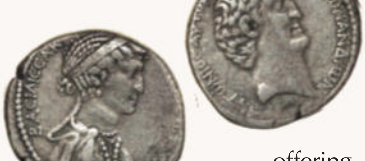
Ptolemy Soter, the first of the Ptolemaic dynasty, quickly established himself as conforming to Egyptian cultural practices. In addition to adopting Egyptianizing portraiture, he also presented himself as a protector of the Egyptians. The first thing he did was amplify the misdeeds of Cleomenes, who was, effectively, the Macedonian governor of Egypt under Alexander. His tenure as governor was characterized by Arrian as one of "many grievous wrongs" (*Anabasis* 7.23.6), which likely included profiteering from famine and abusing Egyptian priesthoods for money (Pseudo-Aristotle, *Oeconomicus* 2.1352). Arrian even cites a letter supposedly from Alexander acknowledging Cleomenes' abuses (*Anabasis* 7.23.8). For Ptolemy I, who eventually had him murdered, Cleomenes served as a reminder of bad rulership, the wrongs of which he was righting. Ptolemy I also acted as a patron of Egyptian cults, something in marked contrast to Cleomenes' behaviour, returning – according to the Stele of the Satrap (311 BC) – statues and other religious objects, such as scrolls, from Syria to the temples from which they had been allegedly removed by the Persians. These methods served to communicate the Ptolemies' respect of and willingness to embrace Egyptian practices.

A bronze appliqué of Ptolemy I depicted as Dionysus, dated to the third century BC.

© The Walters Art Museum

A seal impression with the cartouches of Ptolemy I, dated to ca. 305–282 BC.

© Los Angeles County Art Museum



A coin stamped with the profiles of Kleopatra and Mark Anthony, dated to ca. 36–34 BC. Kleopatra's features have been altered to reflect those of Mark Anthony.

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(Top) A relief from the anteroom in the sanctuary of the Great Temple in Abu Simbel depicting Ramesses II making an offering to Amun. The stance of Ramesses II is reminiscent of the figures in the later relief depicting Kleopatra and Caesarion at Dendera.

© Olaf Tausch / Wikimedia Commons

(Bottom left) A portrait of red-haired woman from Herculaneum, dated to the first century AD, which has been proposed to be a posthumous portrait of Kleopatra VII, based on the portrait's facial features, hair style, and diadem.

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(Bottom right) A fresco from the House of Marcus Fabius Rufus at Pompeii, dated to 46-44 BC, likely depicting Kleopatra VII as Venus Genetrix and Caesarion as a cupid, possibly created in conjunction with Julius Caesar's foundation of the Temple of Venus Genetrix in Rome.

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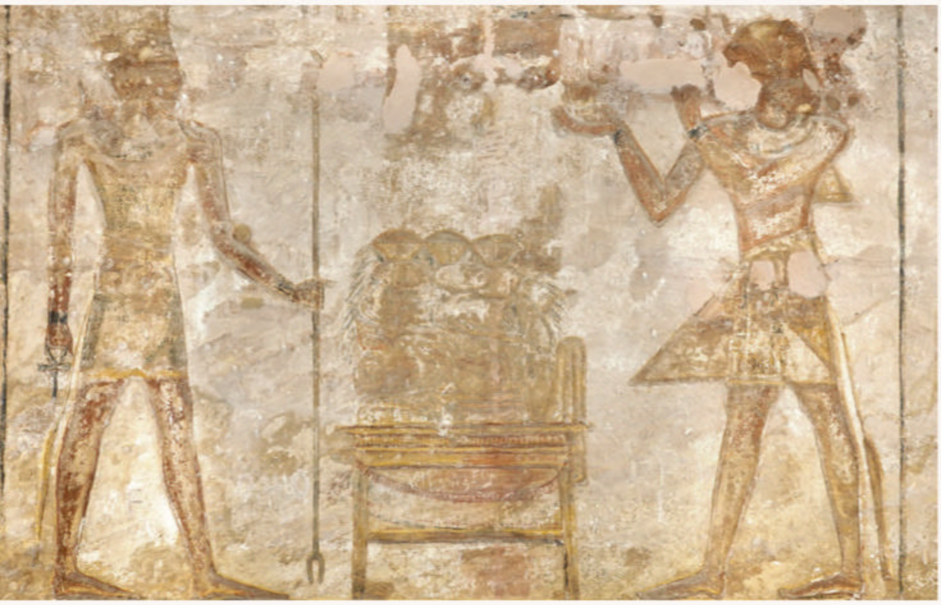
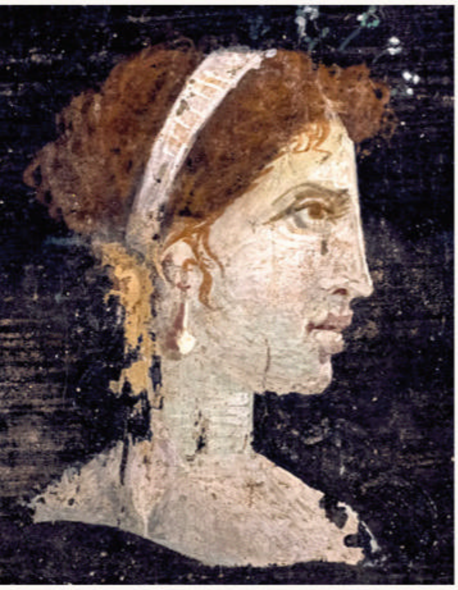
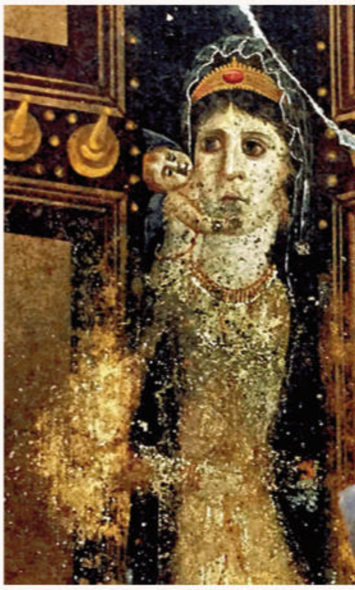
offering to various gods throughout the Temple of Abu Simbel.

What the colossal carving of Kleopatra from Dendera also represents, however, is that the images we have of the queen were not usually reflective of her actual appearance, since they served to display a religious and political message to the mostly illiterate populace. The relief of Kleopatra on Dendera could be any Ptolemaic or Pharaonic queen because the image itself was set to conform to certain artistic standards and presents a motif of power and religious compliance, rather than reflecting any of her unique characteristics.

We see a similar generality in the surviving free-standing sculptures since they often were used to decorate temples or public spaces. So much so that it is often difficult to determine which Ptolemaic queen is being represented in various statues. One of the most famous Egyptian-style statues now identified as Kleopatra VII is a granite piece held in the Royal Ontario Museum, but it was initially proposed to be some of the earlier Ptolemaic queens. Now it is identified as Kleopatra VII, not because it reflects any facial characteristic associated with her, but rather because of the pillar and crown with which the sculpture is adorned.



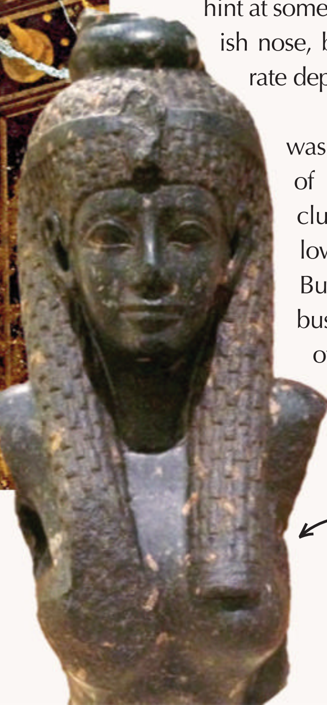




Greek Kleopatra

To represent the Greek side of her heritage, Kleopatra's face was also depicted in Hellenistic-style busts and coinage, but these mediums present issues as well. In busts, like the Berlin-Altes Museum and Vatican examples, Kleopatra is depicted in the realistic but also idealized style of the period. In the Berlin bust she is shown with a straight, prominent nose, full cheeks, and a small chin. This image is not as generic as the Egyptian-style depictions; however, it was standard practice in the Hellenistic style to carve the subjects as young and without faults. Like the Egyptian style, certain motifs became traditional and were uniformly applied to all figures, regardless of accuracy. For instance, the use of large, wide-open eyes and ringed necks became characteristic for all Hellenistic queens – both are present in the Berlin bust. Hellenistic queens' appearances were also often assimilated to well-known Greek goddesses, like Aphrodite, to emphasize their divinity. By the later Ptolemaic period, the more powerful queens, like Kleopatra III and Kleopatra VII, were shown with some masculine features to emphasize their ruling power, and, in the case of Kleopatra VII, to remind viewers of her legitimate inheritance of power from her father. So, it can be surmised that the surviving Hellenistic-style busts of the queen hint at some of her features, like her large-ish nose, but are not completely accurate depictions either.

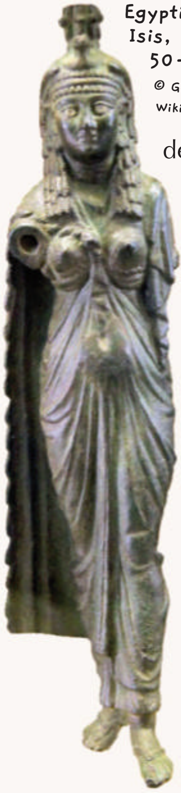
Coinage from the period was issued with a profile portrait of the ruling monarch and included a name inscription, allowing for easier identification. But, as with the Hellenistic-style busts, the portraits on coins were often idealized and included recognizable motifs. Coinage issued in the name of



An Egyptian bust from the Ontario Museum believed to depict Kleopatra in traditional Egyptian royal dress.

© KevinDInno / Wikimedia Commons

Kleopatra early in her reign shows an idealized appearance similar to the Berlin bust, with full cheeks and a prominent nose. Yet in the coinage she later jointly issued with Antony, Kleopatra is shown with a much thinner face, and the hooked noses on both figures are strikingly similar. It was common practice in Roman coinage to make figures on the same coins look similar, so here Kleopatra was assimilated to Antony's profile, suggesting that the more hooked nose is likely not accurate to her visage either.



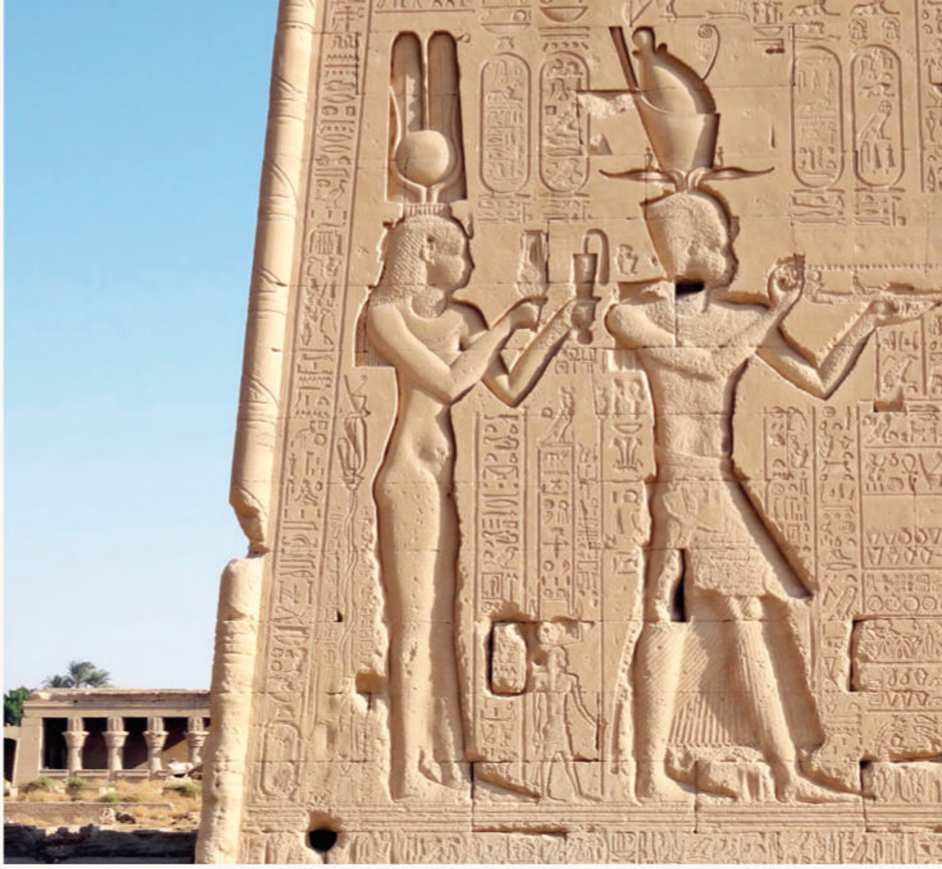
A bronze statuette of Kleopatra in the guise of the Egyptian goddess Isis, dated to ca. 50–30 BC.

© Gary Todd / Wikimedia Commons

A final issue with determining what Kleopatra actually looked like is the general lack of surviving pieces from her lifetime. There are only three Hellenistic/Roman-style busts that have been confidently identified as her, along with a handful of coin types, and the few Egyptian-style reliefs and sculptures. This is a common issue historians face when examining art from the ancient world, but representations of Kleopatra may also be more rare than usual since the Romans took control of Egypt after her death – Rome may have wanted to remove reminders of the powerful queen, especially within Egypt, as Augustus' propaganda men went to work.

Kleopatra's appearance

So, what does all of this tell us about what Kleopatra actually looked like? From the various surviving images that were produced during her lifetime, we can guess that Kleopatra had a full-face with a prominent nose. This means she was not necessarily a classic beauty, a fact hinted at by Plutarch when he noted that her beauty "was not of that incomparable kind which instantly captivates the beholder" (*Antony* 27.2). Perhaps, then, the reputation for beauty that is credited to her by other Roman writers was not due solely to her physical appearance, but rather derived from her personality, intelligence, and desirability. Kleopatra's education was one of the best in the world and would have equalled or exceeded the educations received by most Roman men. She was a formidable ruler in her own right who descended from a long line of powerful kings and queens. She was daily worshiped as a goddess. All these characteristics would have combined to make her irresistible to men like Caesar and Antony, who may have never met another woman as intelligent and outspoken as she. She was, as the saying goes, the whole package.

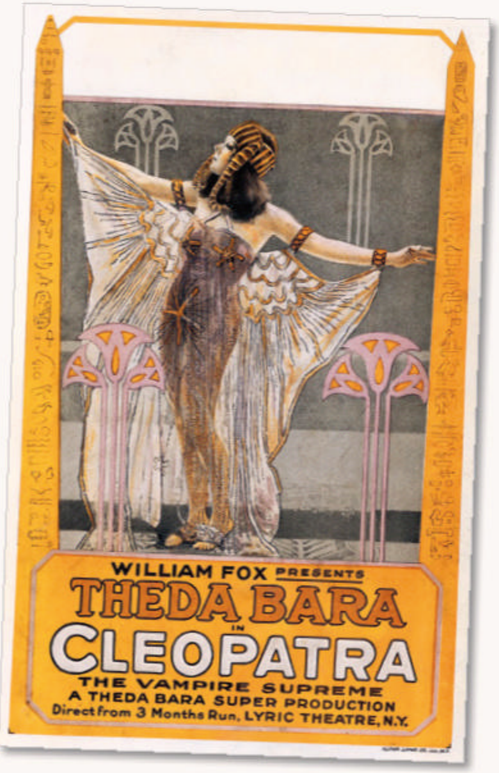


A relief on the rear of the Temple of Hathor at Dendera depicting Kleopatra VII and her son Ptolemy XV in the traditional dress of Egyptian royalty. Egyptian pharaohs had used the same motifs and styles since the creation of the Narmer Pallette in the late fourth millennium BC.

© Olaf Tausch / Wikimedia Commons

Yet since she was labelled a *persona non grata* after her death, her image continued to be adapted to the norms of each period through which her story flowed, and she was transformed from the authoritative queen, who had used the dynastic and religious imagery of her day to bolster her rule, into the simplified and unthreatening version of the beautiful, exotic, and even fetishized queen we know today. The tradition of idealizing portraits during her lifetime and the reframing of her character after her death mean that we may never know what she truly looked like, relegating her to an eternity as the faceless Kleopatra. **AH**

Tara Sewell-Lasater is the Director of First-Year Experience at Montana State University. She earned her PhD in Ancient History from the University of Houston. Her research focuses on Ptolemaic queenship.


WILLIAM FOX PRESENTS
THEDA BARA
IN
CLEOPATRA
THE VAMPIRE SUPREME
A THEDA BARA SUPER PRODUCTION
Direct from 3 Months Run, LYRIC THEATRE, N.Y.

A window card for the 1917 silent film *Cleopatra*, starring Theda Bara. The film was subject to many cuts. It was supposedly later thought to be too indecent to show in theatres. Kleopatra was long the subject of such sexually-charged depictions.

© HA / Wikimedia Commons

An intaglio, dated to ca. 175–115 BC, depicting Kleopatra II. Depictions of most, if not all, Hellenistic monarchs followed the same visual language, such as depicting rulers as younger than they really were.

© The Walters Art Museum

CIRCUS FACTIONS OF THE ROMAN PRINCIPATE

GAMES AND GLORY

Chariot races were the earliest, longest-lived, and most popular of all the forms of public games in the Roman world. The highly complex task of organizing races in circuses across the empire fell upon the four factions, the professional organizations of performers which were known by their colours: the Blues, Greens, Reds, and Whites.

By Sinclair W. Bell

The *ludi* (from *ludus*, meaning 'game', 'sport', or 'play') were public games held to benefit and entertain the Roman people. *Ludi* were held in association with the major religious festivals and were also presented in connection with the cult of the Roman state. Chariot races held in the circus (*ludi circenses*) were the earliest and longest-lived of all the forms of public games in the Roman world.

Unfortunately, we will never fully understand the chariot races of the Regal period because the historical record is incomplete. During the Republican era, chariot races in Rome were part of the program of the main public games, such as the *Ludi Romani* in honour of Jupiter in September, celebrated for the first time in 491 BC, but only annually from 392 or 366 BC. Originally, they lasted just one day, but they lengthened to a fortnight under Augustus, and even to sixteen days in the High Empire. From the first century BC onwards, other games were also organized, either to celebrate a military victory, the inauguration of a temple, or to commemorate a member of the imperial family. By the end of the Republic, there were around seventeen circus games per year. In the mid-fourth century AD, one calendar lists 66 days of such circus games, the equivalent of more than two months in the year!

The Circus Maximus

According to legend, the earliest chariot races took place in the Murcia valley (between the Palatine and Aventine hills) at Rome's founding, when Romulus oversaw the games at the festival of the Consualia. This festival centered around the altar of the agrarian deity Consus, who later had an underground shrine at the turning post. These legendary races ended with the seizure of the Sabine women, intertwining the Murcia valley (site of the later Circus Maximus) with the foundation story of Rome itself. Tarquinius Priscus, Rome's legendary fifth king, is credited with laying the foundation of the Circus Maximus in the seventh century BC. Tarquinius Superbus, Rome's legendary seventh and final king, is said to have brought about further improvements in the late sixth century.

A fragment of an Etruscan cinerary urn depicts two *trigae* (a three-horse chariot). Chariot racing was a common sport in antiquity, with its popularity reaching its height in the Roman Empire.

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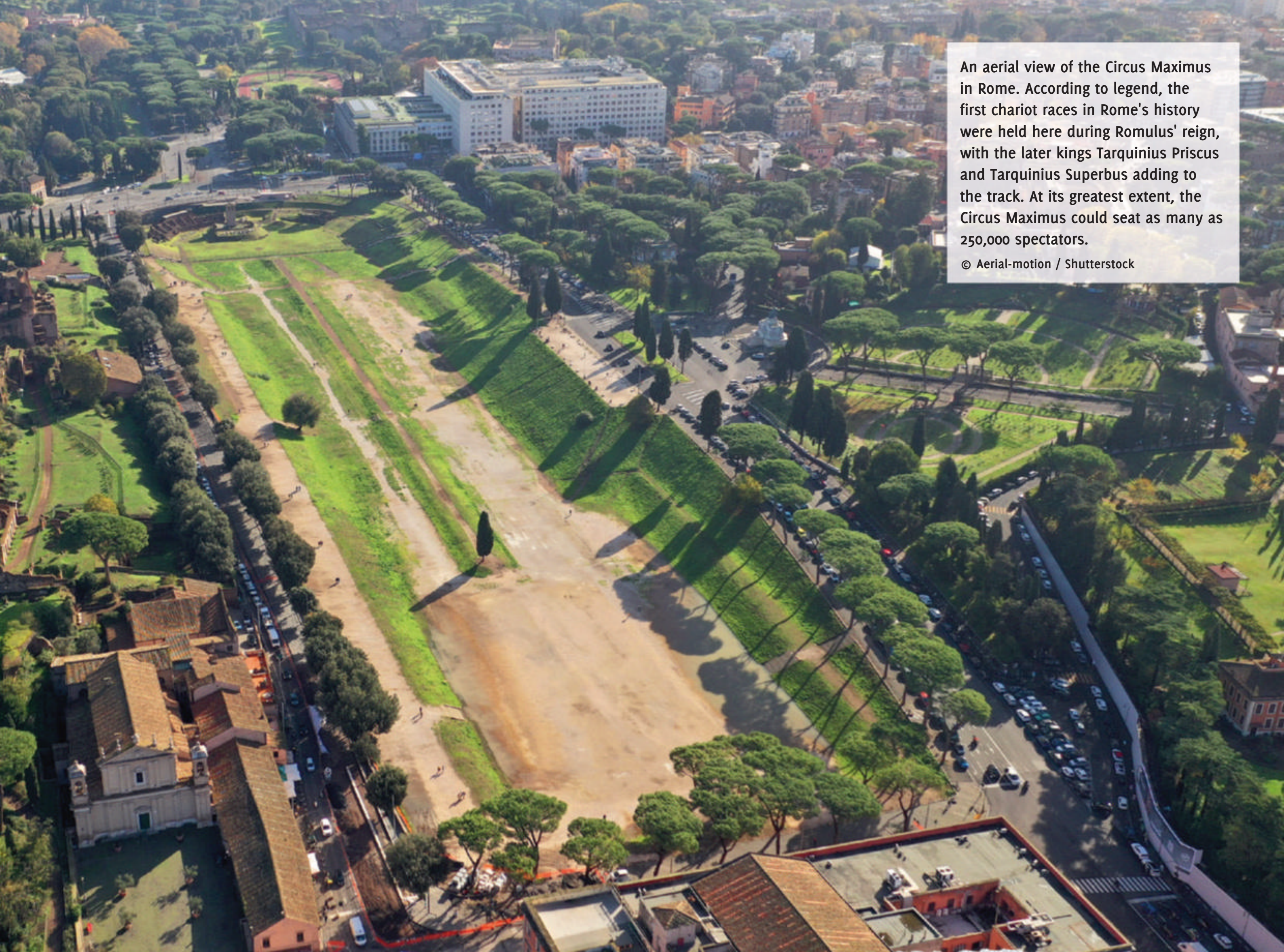
The form of the Circus Maximus was subsequently crystallized in two major phases: first initiated under Julius Caesar and completed by Augustus; and then by Trajan, under whom the building achieved its canonical form: measuring ca. 600 m long and 150 m wide, with an *arena* or track 550 m long and 80 m wide. The venue could have accommodated approximately 150,000 spectators, though it may have been less or as many as 250,000.



An aerial view of the Circus Maximus in Rome. According to legend, the first chariot races in Rome's history were held here during Romulus' reign, with the later kings Tarquinius Priscus and Tarquinius Superbus adding to the track. At its greatest extent, the Circus Maximus could seat as many as 250,000 spectators.

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The horseshoe design included tiered seating along the parallel sides and the semi-circular end and twelve starting gates (*carceres*) at the open end. A long, raised central barrier (*euripus*) divided the track. This barrier was marked by conical turning-posts (*metae*) at either end and with two devices (movable eggs and dolphins) for tracking the seven laps of each race. Additionally, the barrier of the Circus Maximus contained Augustus' obelisk and statues of and shrines dedicated to various deities, including Consus and Cybele, a mother goddess.

In its fully developed imperial form, the Circus Maximus was *the* grandest showpiece for Rome's hallowed traditions, urban splendor, and global ambitions – "a fitting place for a nation which has conquered the world", as Pliny the Younger wrote in the second century AD (*Panegyric* 51.3).

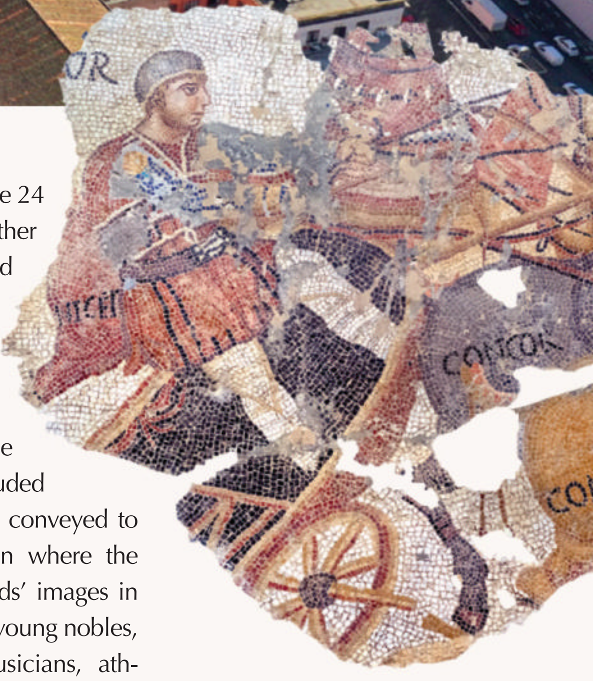
An Etruscan gold filigree pendant, dated to the fourth century BC, depicting a charioteer driving a *quadriga*.

© Dallas Museum of Art

A day at the races

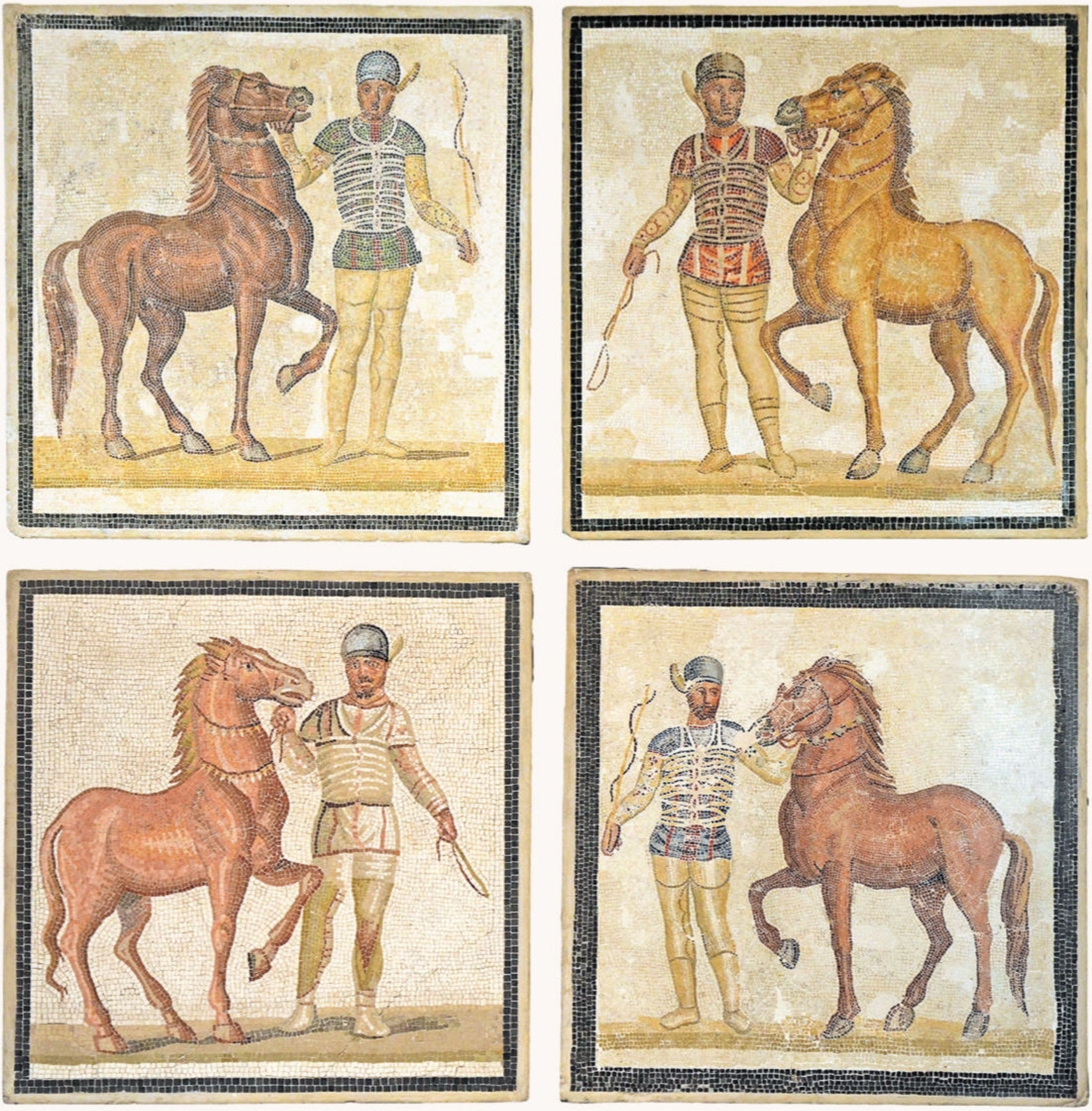
On a race day in Rome there were 24 chariot competitions, among other events. The races were preceded by the sacred procession that paraded through the city streets and terminated in the circus, where it lapped around the track. The procession was led by the president of the games and included images of the gods, which were conveyed to their monumental stone pavilion where the emperor also sat. Trailing the gods' images in the procession were magistrates, young nobles, temple attendants, dancers, musicians, athletes, and chariot drivers.

At the procession's conclusion, the game magistrate, who sat in the loggia over the *carceres*, dropped a white handkerchief onto



A mosaic of a charioteer of the Red faction, likely dated to the fourth century AD, driving a *quadriga* at the Circus of Barcelona.

© Ángel M. Felicísimo / Flickr



A mosaic, dating to the fourth century AD, depicting chariot racers in the colours of the four factions. There is uncertainty in the sources as to when the factions first developed, but it is certain that they were large administrative organizations supplying charioteers and their teams for the races.

© Carole Raddato / Flickr

the track. There the different factions' teams of two- (*bigae*), three- (*trigae*), or, more commonly, four-horse (*quadrigae*) chariots sat ready. Four, six, eight, or twelve teams of horses competed in each race, including multiple teams from the same faction. Teams were assigned their places by lot to provide equal opportunities. The starting gates were unlocked simultaneously by a springing mechanism operated by the ground attendants. The audience monitored the progress of the race by checking the lap-counting devices at either end of the *euripus*.

The teams raced counterclockwise and circled the central barrier seven times. As chariots were light and built for speed and because the charioteers veered as close as possible to the central barrier to shorten their paths, accidents called 'shipwrecks' (*naufragia*) often occurred, usually by the turning posts. Visual representations in diverse media provide key details about the races; many emphasize the grisly crashes. The finish line was located two-thirds down the right side of the track and sat parallel to the *pulvinar* and the judges' tribunal.

Charioteers' inscriptions, both honorific and funerary, detail the various strategies by which they won. The exhaustive, meticulous catalogues of their races and self-conscious

A fragmentary mold-blown glass beaker decorated with a *quadrigae*, and bearing an inscription that reads "vade Pyramus" ('Go Pyramus').

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The so-called Flaminius obelisk, which was brought to Rome on the orders of Augustus in 10 BC, stood in the centre of the Circus Maximus atop the *Euripus*.

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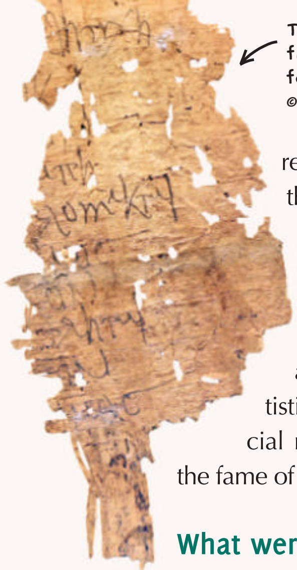

This papyrus fragment from Egypt, dated to the fifth to sixth century AD, contains a program for chariot races and sport events.

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references to rivals' records in these texts reflect a sense of professional pride that finds parallels in the funerary monuments of gladiators. The public documentation and display of these career statistics not only ensured their social memory but also perpetuated the fame of their home teams or factions.

What were the Circus factions?

The staging of the games required the support of a complex infrastructure. For instance, modern estimates suggest that a single day of games required as many as 800 horses, and this demand, combined with need to supply horses to the Roman cavalry, contributed toward the rise of an extensive animal trade across the Mediterranean. The enormous burden of these costs and organization fell upon the four racing teams or factions which served as contractors. They were responsible for procuring the racehorses, maintaining stables with animals and staff, training the athletes, and providing the necessary equipment (e.g. chariots). These factions or clubhouses were known by their colours: the Blues (*factio veneta*), the Greens (*factio prasina*), the Reds (*factio russata*), and the Whites (*factio albata*). The introduction of two other factions, the Gold (*aurea*) and Purple (*purpurea*), during the reign of Domitian was short-lived and ended with the death of the emperor.

The earliest historical record of the factions can be traced to the late Republic in Rome, when Agrippa, serving as aedile and responsible for Rome's infrastructure and festivals (including *ludi circenses*), appears to have played a decisive role in the organization, if not the very formation, of the factions. He transformed the area of the Campus Martius, where the *Trigarium*, a racetrack used mainly for training horses, was located.

The racing stables (*stabula factionum*) were also located in the Campus Martius, where they utilized the nearby equestrian training ground. This location was about 1–2 km away from the Circus Maximus itself. The stable house of the Green faction has long been known beneath the Palazzo della Cancelleria, situated between the present Corso Vittorio Emanuele II and the Campo de' Fiori. Some 350 meters away, situated between the via Giulia and the Tiber River, the faction house of the Reds was recently identified from a new campaign of archaeological excavations. This includes a complex with a block of stables, with seven parallel bays, that was built in the Augustan period. In the early empire, Roman writers express a preference for African (Libyan) horses, which were singled out for their speed and endurance. Both private and imperial stud farms throughout the provinces would raise and train animals to race, with the animals visibly bearing the farms' brand marks, as well as the names and icons of the farms, on their flanks.

As independent agents, the factions were richly rewarded for these services by the sponsor of the games, who had to underwrite a race day. Early in their history, the factions were lucrative syndicates: the managers (*domini*), drawn from the wealthy members of the equestrian class, who supervised several hundred employees with specialized roles – coaches, veterinarians, and grooms, for instance – at their faction stables, were able to demand ever-higher prices for their services. For instance, Cassius Dio, the second-century-AD Roman historian, relates the story of the Roman official who refused to meet the fi-

An inscription from Lyon commemorating chariot races in the local theatre that were organized by the magistrate Sextus Ligurus Marinus on the occasion of his appointment as priest of the city.

© Romainbehar / Wikimedia Commons

Bronze gaming tokens, dated to the second to third century AD, depicting a circus scene on one side and a Roman numeral on the reverse. Chariot races in the Roman Empire were the subject of intense betting, with people losing fortunes on bad bets.

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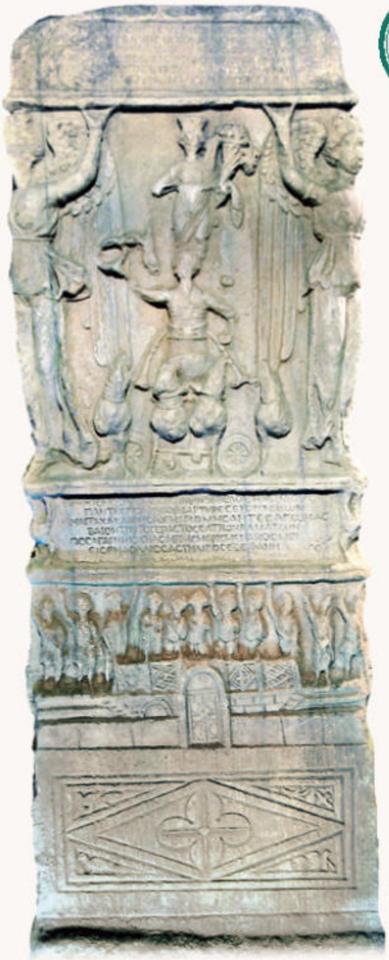
Dens of iniquity

Early Christian writers decried the Roman chariot races as places where people indulged in sinful behaviour. Tertullian, writing in the late second century AD, said how the circus was "possessed by all those spirits of the devil" (*On Spectacles* 8). Indeed, descriptions of the activities in the Circus Maximus paint it as a place where all manner of vices were accommodated.

Infamously, Ovid describes how attending the races was an opportunity for meeting a sexual partner (*Amores* 3.2), while Juvenal mentions prostitutes working there (*Satires* 3.60–68). Tertullian laments the excitement of betting at the races (*On Spectacles* 16), which is echoed by other authors, such as Juvenal, who describes how a praetor lost his fortune betting on races he had organized (*Satires* 11.197–204). The Circus Maximus was also a setting for diviners, likely people wanting to learn the outcome of a race before placing a bet. Horace, for example, describes how fortune tellers operated at both the Circus Maximus and the forum (*Satires* 1.6.111–115).



A view of the upper part of a victory monument dedicated by the Green faction to Porphyrius the Charioteer, one of the most successful charioteers in Roman history, who was active in the late fifth and early sixth centuries AD. For more on Porphyrius, see the article in *AH* 1.

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DID YOU KNOW?

The central barrier of the Circus Maximus, which was properly constructed during the reign of Trajan, is often referred to as the *spina*. However, the only instance of a primary source referring to it as such comes from Late Antiquity. Earlier writers referred to the barrier as the *euripus* due to the presence of several water basins.

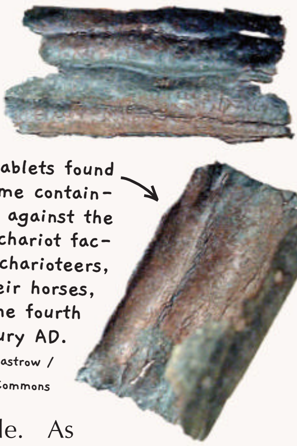
nancial demands of the Blues and Greens and instead threatened to run dogs; the conflict was only resolved when Nero intervened by providing the victory prizes (61.6.2–3). Control over the factions was eventually assumed by the imperial administration. Even so, the factions continued to function as powerful business concerns with international reach, such as the operation of provincial stud farms.

The factions competed with one another for resources, especially athletes and horses, as well as victories. However, from the early imperial period onward, there were allegiances between certain factions: the Greens were allied with the Reds, while the Blues and the Whites cooperated with one another (these allegiances were variable, however, and we find other arrangements in the provinces, where local branches seemingly had autonomy). Each of the factions attracted their respective social followings akin to 'fan clubs,' but it was the Greens and Blues who enjoyed the greatest popular support as well as imperial favour.

Charioteers were ranked according to their level of experience. An *auriga* was a less experienced and thus lower-ranking figure who drove a two-horse chariot. An *agitator* was a well-tested and higher-ranking driver who commanded a four-horse chariot. Like gladiators and actors, most charioteers were of low social status, either enslaved or freed persons. Victories could bring them wealth, manumission, and fame, including even idolization by emperors. Their names and images survive on honorific and funerary inscriptions as well as on hand-held souvenirs, such as glass sport cups and terracotta lamps, and on domestic mosaics from across the empire. These inscriptions confirm that athletes moved between factions like free agents (though some are still slaves and bought) and that the competition for rising stars must have been great.

What role did the factions play?

Discussions of the circus factions tend to be dominated by those in Constantinople in Late Antiquity, with a focus on their role in the infamous 'Nika Riot' in Justinian's reign (see Solel, *MW:CC* 8). However, the character and function of the factions in imperial Rome was quite different from that in sixth-century Constantinople. As the late Roman historian Alan Cameron demonstrated 50 years ago, the factions in imperial Rome were not a source of political disturbance and urban unrest as they were in the early Byzantine period, when they became amalgamated with the theater claques, which had a long history of rowdiness.



Two lead tablets found outside Rome containing curses against the different chariot factions, the charioteers, and their horses, dated to the fourth century AD.

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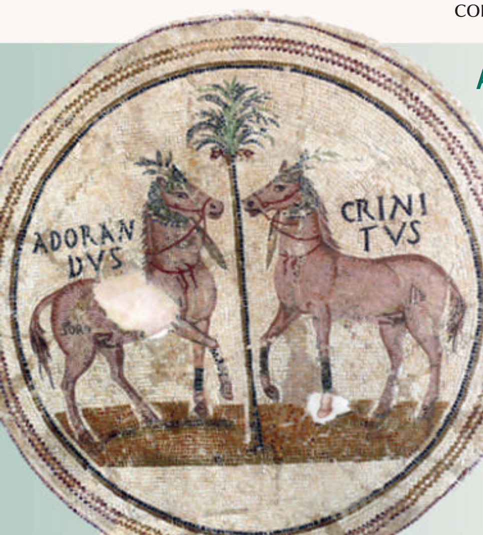


A mosaic from Hadrumentum, dated to ca. AD 175-200, depicting two horses. African horses were considered the finest racehorses in the early empire.

© Ad Meskens / Wikimedia Commons

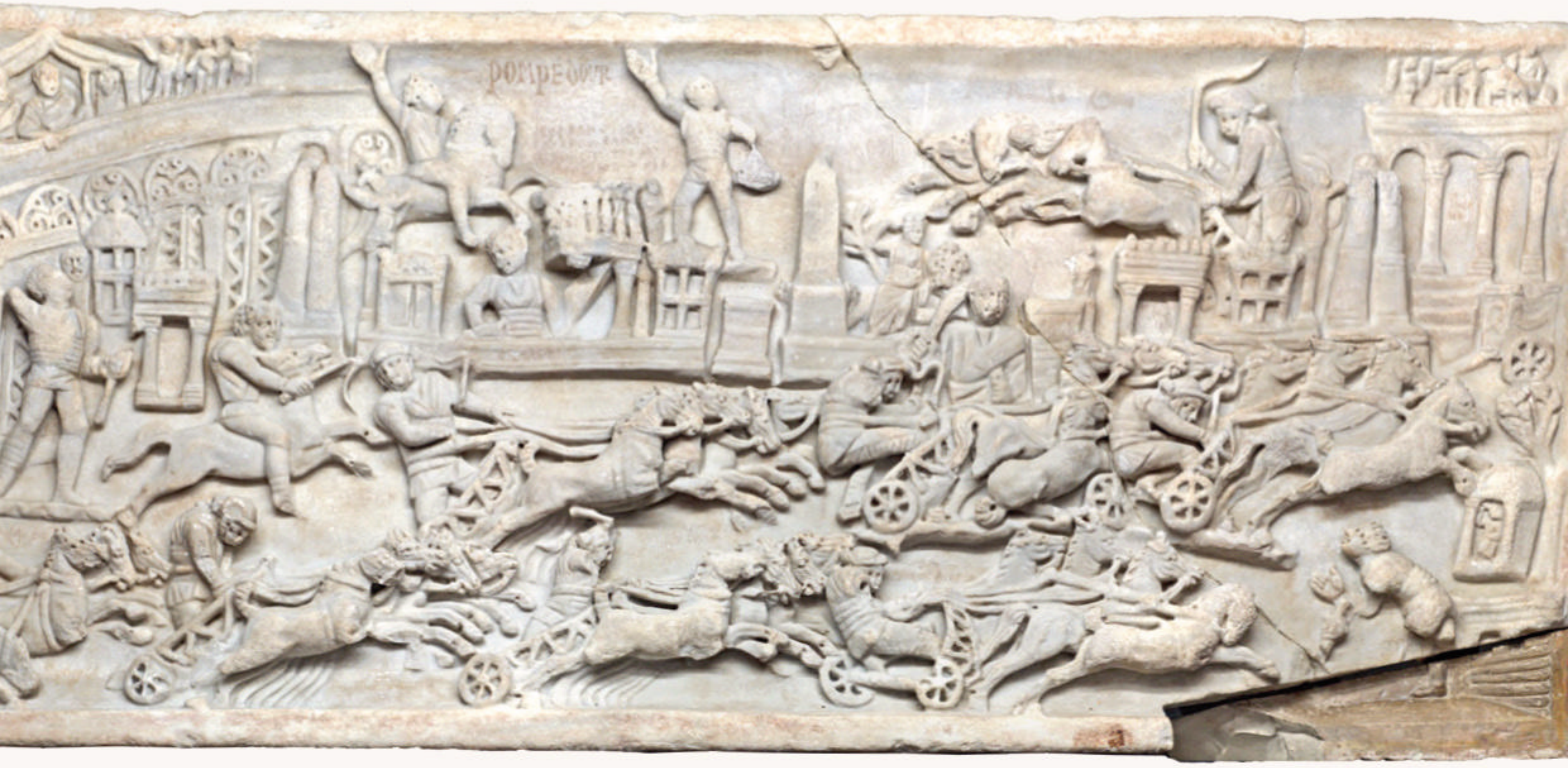
African thoroughbreds

Horses from North Africa were renowned for both their speed and their endurance in ancient Rome. For example, Diocles, one of the most successful charioteers in Roman history, said he was the best driver of African horses specifically.

The peoples of pre-Roman North Africa had a long history of horsemanship. Notably, the Numidians were renowned for their light cavalry, contingents of which were key elements of the armies of the Punic Wars, often helping one army to victory. Horsemanship was such a core element of Numidian identity that a depiction of a horseman featured on most, if not all, Numidian coinage. Similarly, among the Gaetuli, according to Strabo, "horse-breeding is followed with such exceptional interest by the kings that the number of colts every year amounts to one hundred thousand" (17.3.19). As such, it should come as no surprise horses from North Africa were prized as racehorses.

A red intaglio, dated to 25-1 BC, depicting a charioteer riding in a ten-horse chariot, a rarity in ancient Rome.

© Rijksmuseum van Oudheden



Rather, we should think of factions in the imperial period as akin to the major professional soccer clubs, with each club or faction maintaining its own 'stable' of star performers, who occasionally moved between them. Fan associations in turn supported each of their preferred factions and contributed to their financial success by purchasing the sporting merchandise they offered. The costumes of at least one faction, for instance, spawned imitation clothing for children, whose parents outfitted them with "little green jackets" (Juvenal, *Satires* 5.143–4).

That is not to argue, however, that the factions did not provoke intense rivalries amongst their fans or that they lacked social significance beyond the competitions alone. Some Romans sought to harness charioteers' seeming good fortune, invincibility, and wealth by wearing their images on their person with finger rings or amulets, some of which were embedded with a gem the same colour as their prized faction and inscribed with commands that echoed the emphatic chants of the crowd. Others commissioned curse tablets (*defixiones*), which were inscribed by magicians with texts, sometimes accompanied by visceral images, summoned demons to maim or kill athletic competitors and/or their horses. Pliny the Elder's account of the funeral-run-amok for the charioteer Felix from the Red faction demonstrates the extremes of fan behaviour: distraught at the death of his favourite charioteer, a fan jumped onto the deceased athlete's funeral pyre (*Natural History* 7.168).

These diverse, *individual* testimonies reflect how central *victory* was to the Roman culture of spectacle: not just to the organizers or to the athletes who competed in them, but also to the spectators for whom they were a socially binding religion, "the height of all their hopes" (Ammianus Marcellinus, 28.4.29). **AH**

Sinclair W. Bell is a researcher who focuses on sport and spectacle in the Roman Empire. He appears in* Rome's Chariot Superstar*, a documentary on the Smithsonian Channel.

A white marble relief, possibly from a sarcophagus, dated to the second to third century AD, depicting a *quadriga* race in the Circus Maximus. Chariot races were one of the most popular events in ancient Rome, drawing crowds as large as 250,000, with many people backing one of the four racing teams — the Reds, the Whites, the Blues, and the Greens.

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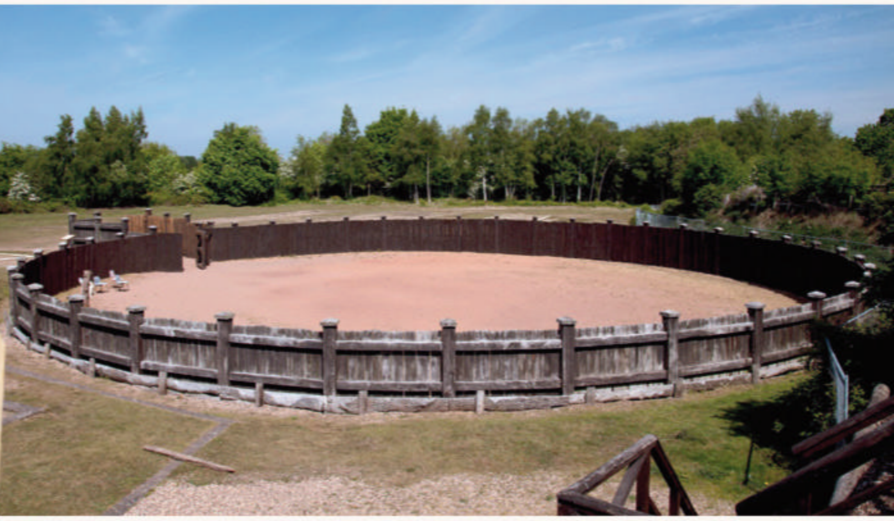

The *gyrus* from Lunt Roman fort, which is believed to have been used for the training of horses. Both imperial and private stud farms throughout the empire provided horses for chariot races.

© Gail Johnson / Shutterstock

One side of an ivory diptych depicting Flavius Anastasius Probus, a consul in Constantinople in AD 517, waving a *mappa*, the piece of cloth that signalled the start of a chariot race.

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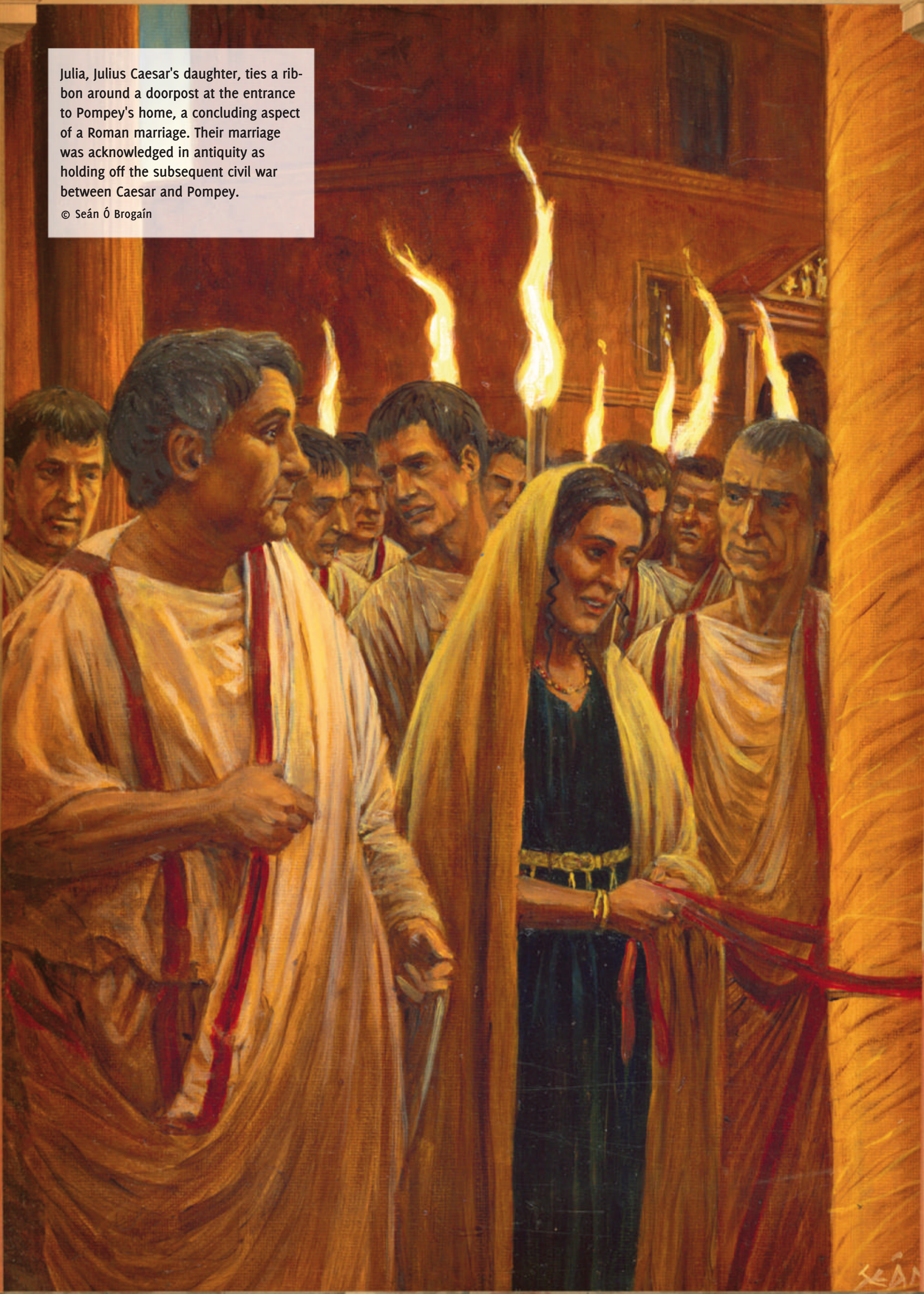


Julia, Julius Caesar's daughter, ties a ribbon around a doorpost at the entrance to Pompey's home, a concluding aspect of a Roman marriage. Their marriage was acknowledged in antiquity as holding off the subsequent civil war between Caesar and Pompey.

© Seán Ó Brogaín

WOMEN'S ROLE IN ROMAN POLITICS

JULIA CAESAR

By Nina Butterfield

Women often take a backseat in the stories we tell about ancient Rome. Julia Caesaris, Julius Caesar's only daughter, exemplifies the integral role women played in the Roman political sphere. Caesar married her off to Pompey to solidify his most crucial alliance. Lucan claims her role as the uniting force between Caesar and Pompey endowed her with the power to prevent civil war. She is among the few women credited with this much influence in Roman history by any Roman writer. However, what Lucan understood when he composed the *Pharsalia* has largely been overlooked in contemporary classicism: that women and marriage had the potential to change the course of Roman history.

Julia was born amid the political tumult of Caesar's early career. The civil war between Sulla and Marius had just ended. In the aftermath, Sulla faced the question of how to deal with the remaining members of Marius' caucus. He decided to target the lifeblood of their political alliances – their marriages. Sulla forced his opponents to divorce and reorganized them into engagements with his daughters, nieces, and granddaughters. In doing so, he destroyed long-standing political alliances, weakened what remained of Marius' family, and forced significant figures into his sphere of influence.

The famous general and Julia's future husband, Pompey, fell victim to Sulla's marriage tactics. It was in Sulla's interest to forge closer ties with him, so he arranged a marriage between Pompey and his stepdaughter, Aemilia Scaura, showing little regard for the fact that both parties were already happily married. Neither party was keen on the new match, but Pompey and Aemilia had to accept their fate despite the lack of enthusiasm.

Sulla attempted to do the same to Caesar, who, having fought on the losing side, was a political pariah in Sulla's government. Unlike Pompey, however, Caesar refused, putting his life and the remnants of his political career in peril. In response, Sulla seized his inheritance and ordered his death. Left with few options, Caesar fled. In time, Caesar's mother used her familial connections to plead his case, and Sulla would eventually cave, allowing him to return. Even so, Caesar knew he existed on perilous ground in Rome. So, he left and began his illustrious military career.

In his absence, Julia grew up. She was tutored in various disciplines, from traditional female roles to topics such as history and philosophy. She bore witness to Sulla's death, her father's return to Rome and his re-entry into the political sphere, and she became known for her interest in literature and theatre. At fifteen, her mother died, and her grandmother took over responsibility for her education. As Caesar's only daughter, she was arguably the most valuable tool in his arsenal of political weapons. This was not lost on Caesar or his allies and opponents in Rome. The memory of the recent civil conflict and its fallout had instilled in all Romans the significance of marriage in politics.

Julia's story almost ended in 59 BC, when Caesar organized her marriage to Quintus Caepio. Quintus Caepio could refer to one of two people, Marcus Junius Brutus or his uncle and adoptive father, Quintus Servilius Caepio. Following the death of Brutus' biological father at the hands of Pompey, he was adopted by Quintus Servilius Caepio, his uncle, and began to go by the same name as a result. Between these two men, it is unclear which Julia was betrothed to. However, it is more probable that Caesar would marry Julia to the younger Brutus, a highly promising young statesman. Marrying Julia to the elder Caepio – a man coming to the end of a relatively uneventful political career – makes little strategic sense for Caesar. One could argue that the marriage was arranged not for political gain but instead as a reward for Quintus Caepio's strong support for Caesar during his conflict with Marcus Bibulus. However, a marriage to the younger Brutus would likely have sufficed as a reward for the elder Caepio whilst offering more significant political gain for Caesar. It is unlikely Caesar would choose the less advantageous route. Either way, only days before Julia was meant to marry, Caesar rescinded the engagement and offered her to Pompey the Great, a man of immeasurable power in Rome.

Marriage to Pompey

One cannot overstate the degree to which this marriage came as a shock to everyone. Many were angered by it, presumably Brutus the most so. However, the concern was felt across Roman society. For instance, Cato's reaction was described by Plutarch as follows:

> *Cato then cried out with open mouth, and called the gods to witness, that it was a shameful matter, and not*

> *to be suffered, that they should in that sort make havoc of the empire of selves through those wicked marriages, the governments of the provinces, and of great armies.*
> (Plutarch, *Julius Caesar* 14)

The politics of the marriage was evident to Cato, and his anger over it is a clear indicator of the weight of its political significance. Pompey and Caesar were mighty, but their alliance initiated the first triumvirate, turning them into Rome's junta. The marriage should be viewed as an insurance policy on both sides: neither could betray the other while they shared familial ties. Any alliance between two men with dictatorial ambitions and the money and military to back themselves was fragile, but they were in a mutual checkmate for now.

Cato understood the threat that this union meant for the faltering Republic. Moreover, perhaps his disdain for political allegiance through marriage stemmed from the fragility of such deals. Cato seemed to understand that a political union will always have political ramifications and that with Caesar and Pompey, this could be catastrophic.

Julia became Pompey's fourth wife. He was 47, and she was 24. Despite the circumstances of the marriage, they appear to have been affectionate towards one another. Plutarch described that Pompey would neglect affairs in the forum in favour of time with Julia. Pompey's interest in Julia was a product of his alliance, but it may have also been an incentive. Evidence suggests Julia was equally devoted to Pompey. For example, Plutarch describes how, after riot in the forum, Pompey's blood-spattered clothes were delivered to his home. However, when Julia greeted the slave bearing his clothes, she assumed the worst and fainted. The stress of the event caused her to miscarry her first child (Plutarch, *Pompey* 53.).

It is difficult to know from ancient sources how aware Julia was of her position and whether or not she engaged herself in the political realm of her husband and father. However, we can make inferences. Often, the only information given about Julia is that she was intelligent and happily married to Pompey. There are accounts from Suetonius and Plutarch describing how she engaged Pompey's philosophical and theatrical interests. If this were the case, it is naive to assume her intelligence would not have also extended to politics. A common fallacy surrounding women is ignorance of their circumstances, and while this narrative has repeatedly been discredited, it continues to prevail. If Julia had half the brain her father did and half the education, she was likely still brilliant.

The distinction of her marriage as a 'love match' may prove her intelligence. Roman marriages were rarely successful in this regard. The few other marriages considered 'loving' – Augustus and Livia, Antony and Cleopatra, Claudius and Messalina – almost always involve a woman now believed to have been very intelligent. At the time, these women were considered manipulative – rather than being seen for their intelligence, they were stripped of agency and characterized as wicked. Thus, history indicates a correlation between marriages where 'love' is present and women are presented as 'wicked' or intelligent.

Julia did not act out in the face of an arranged marriage, which could be expected to upset any young woman. However, the implication that Roman women were docile and dutifully adhered to the expectations placed on them is an oversimplification of the period. Julia could have acted out, as many women did. She would not have been ignorant of this option. Instead, she chose to play her part perfectly and, in so doing, protected her father's alliance for longer than it would have otherwise survived. This decision indicates a far greater intelligence and strength of character than she is given credit for. It suggests that she understood her delicate power vacuum and could sacrifice her personal interest for a more significant cause – something her father could not do.

The years 59–55 BC are shaped by Pompey and Caesar's allegiance to each other. During this period, it becomes difficult to discern if the alliance was based on prolonged mutual interest or familial ties as the men's interests diverge. When embroiled in a conflict with the Senate, Pompey was advised to divorce Julia and end relations with Caesar. He refused to do so, even though the Senate's favour was more politically advantageous to him than Caesar's by this point. This is a testament to Julia's success.

Julia's position did not single-handedly form or hold Pompey and Caesar's alliance together. Yet Pompey's loyalty to Julia, when divorce would have served his political interests, indicates her essential role in keeping the coalition alive. In the world of the dying Republic, where the end goal was always power, Caesar and Pompey's interests were inherently in conflict, and an eventual fallout was inevitable. Julia saw this and was highly successful in deterring it, at least temporarily.

In 54 BC, Julia and Pompey conceived another child, and although Julia would carry this child to term, she would not survive the delivery. The child itself died a few days later. At this point, Plutarch describes the reactions of the Roman people as such:

> *For the city now at once began to roll and swell, so to say, with the stir of the coming storm. Things everywhere were in a state of agitation, and everybody's discourse tended to division, now that death had put an end to*

> *that relation which hitherto had been a disguise rather than restrain to the ambition of these men.*
>
> (Plutarch, *Pompey* 53.)

The political consequences of Julia's death were at the forefront of the grief many felt for her. It is a disheartening reality that many did not mourn her, but instead, the alliance between her husband and father, the end of which was in sight.

Julia's death and the political fallout

Out of grief over her death, the Roman people carried her down to the Campus Martius for a public burial. Plutarch states that the primary motivation behind this honour stemmed from the people's devotion to Julia, but he distinguishes that higher benefits were awarded to Caesar than Pompey. While still away in Gaul, Caesar promised a gladiatorial show and a funeral banquet in Julia's honour, which he would eventually follow through on eight years later (Plutarch, *Pompey* 53.).

In early 53 BC, another death struck the fatal blow to the alliance. Crassus, the third member of the first triumvirate, had died while on a campaign. With him gone, a confrontation between the two men neared. In the aftermath of Crassus' death, Caesar could still gain from his alliance with Pompey. He was away in Gaul and removed from day-to-day politics led by a hostile Senate. Pompey remained in Rome and consequently could be of help to him. But the senate opposed Caesar, and Pompey's primary goal was to win back their favour. Therefore, when Caesar proposed that Pompey remarry his great-niece and that he divorce his wife to marry Pompey's daughter, Pompey refused. Instead, in 52 BC, after winning the consulship, Pompey instead chose to marry Crassus' widow, Cornelia. This marriage is widely considered a politically significant move for Pompey, driving him further away from Caesar and towards a reconciliation with the Senate. Caesar would have understood this. Civil war was inevitable.

Lucan reveals an awareness in Roman society of the importance of Julia's marriage to Pompey:

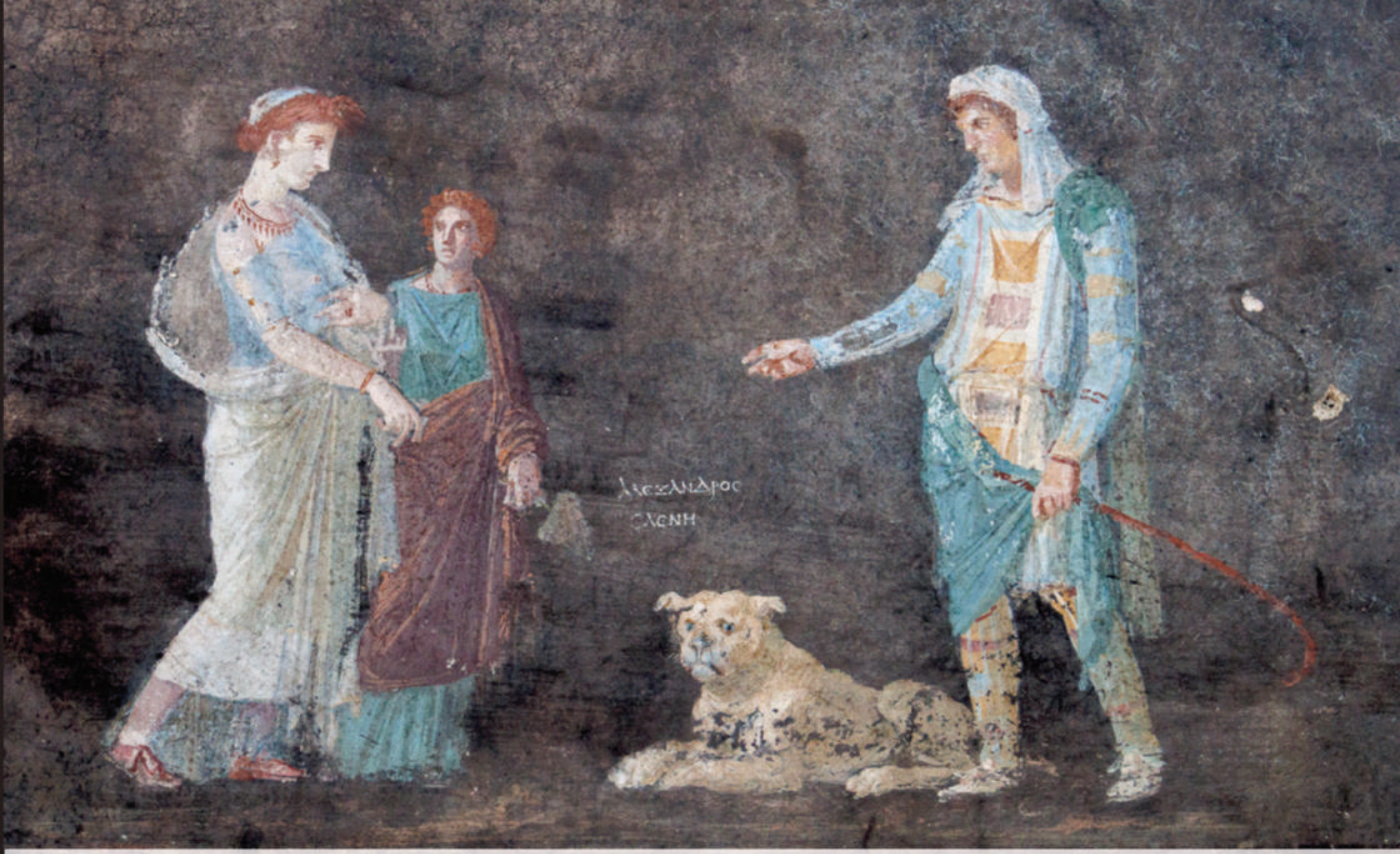
> *But if destiny had granted you a longer stay in the light, alone you could have here restrained your frenzied husband, here your frenzied father, thrown away their swords and joined their armed hands, as Sabine women in between joined fathers – with their sons-in-law. By your death the alliance was shattered and the leaders felt free to commence the war .*
>
> (Lucan, *Pharsalia* 1.114–120)

Other writers also credit Julia with the postponement of civil war. Velleius Paterculus, for example, describes Julia as "the one tie which bound together Pompey and Caesar in a coalition" (2.47.2), while Florus credits her death, along with that of Crassus, as the reason for the outbreak of hostilities between Caesar and Pompey (*Epitome* 2.13.13). Julia died, and history was made because of it. The fact that her death was this consequential indicates the immense power of marriage institutions in Rome. This significance runs contrary to the standard narrative about women's lives in the ancient world, who are frequently depicted as dissociated from the political realm. The few exceptions to this, such as Livia, Messalina, Agrippina, and Julia the Elder, are written off as history's villains. The dominant narrative holds that, despite receiving education, most women were ignorant of the political contexts in which they existed. This assumption is rooted in misogyny – a tacit acceptance of the ancient view of women's passive and submissive nature. Julia reveals the soft power which aristocratic women could exert. They shaped how men interacted with one another; they kept people together, and they tore them apart. It may have been an invisible role, but that does not make it less significant.

As much as politics was an intellectual pursuit, it was also a scramble for marriages and divorces, and the alliances formed through marriage and the words whispered between husbands and wives. Female influence in Roman politics has been erased because we attribute value to domains dominated by men and disparage those dominated by women. As a result, decades of scholarship on Roman history have overlooked the significance of women and marriage, leading to a misunderstanding of the many forces in the Roman political domain. The standard narrative around Caesar's ascent to power, his alliance with Pompey, and his eventual dictatorship often fails to include the marriage dimension as a pivotal piece of his strategy. This does a great disservice to our understanding of this period and of Caesar himself. It may very well be that Caesar's true genius was his ability to navigate the Roman world through marriage.

These periods set the precedent for years to come. Marriage was a strategic tool as the conflict between Octavian and Antony played out, and the former's scramble for a suitable heir is another example of organizing marriage and women's positions for personal gain. For centuries, European empires would employ the same methods to strengthen bonds and create alliances. History was repeatedly made through marriage or as a consequence of it. Julia's story is a prime example of this. She epitomizes how politics often revolved around women in ancient Rome and for centuries to come. **AH**

Nina Butterfield is an undergraduate student at Durham University. She studies Classical Civilization and Politics. Her main interests are gender and classical reception.



A fresco from Pompeii depicting the meeting between Helen and Paris (here called by his other name, Alexandros) with a large dog lying between them. Dogs — and many other animals — were kept as pets in ancient Rome and were dearly loved.

THE DOMESTIC MENAGERIE

ROMAN PETS

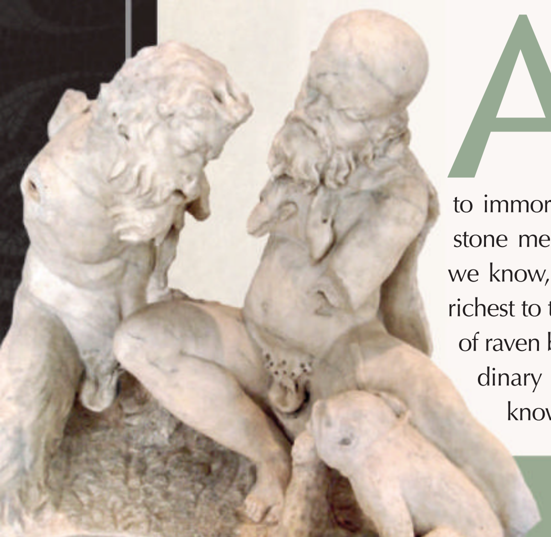
By Philip Matyszak

The Romans were a deeply sentimental people and fond of pets of all sorts. While they had a brutal lack of compassion for animals in general, they made an exception for those animals which they admitted to their households. To these they often became deeply, possibly excessively attached.

As is often the case, we know more of the pets of those Romans wealthy enough to have peers who discussed them in their writings or who were able to immortalize their affection for their pets in stone memorials. Nevertheless, from the little we know, pets were part Roman life from the richest to the poorest. For example, the number of raven bones in army camps suggests that ordinary soldiers kept these birds as pets. We know more about the pets of the legionaries' commander-in-chief, for imperial pets are well-documented, such as the snake which Tiberius used to feed by hand and the the two bears ('Innocence' and 'Goldflake') to which the emperor Valerian used throw those whose petitions he deemed frivolous.

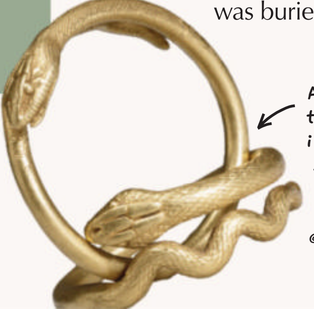
In his *Apophoreta* ('menagerie'), Martial lists a variety of Roman pets including a gazelle, an Egyptian mongoose, and a 'lagalopex', which was probably a lynx. Hares and turtles were among the less exotic beasts kept by common people. However, then as now, the most popular pet was the dog. Romans would have known well of the legendary faithful hound Argus which pined for the return of Odysseus during his ten-year absence and died joyfully upon his master's return. One Roman inscription to a dead dog reads "I carry you to your final resting place with grief as great as the joy I felt when carrying you home in my hands fifteen years ago".

The favourite Roman lap-dog was the Melitus – a breed from Malta, though not the Maltese hound of today. The writer Theophrastus, in his *Characters*, condemns as a vanity the action of a man whose deceased Melitus was buried in an extravagant tomb



A Roman copy of a Hellenistic statue depicting the god Pan, a satyr, and a monkey. All manner of animals were kept as pets in ancient Rome, including monkeys.

© G.dallorto / Wikimedia Commons



A pair of bracelets, dated to the first century AD, in the shape of snakes. Snakes were yet another animal sometimes found in a domestic setting.

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with a sentimental inscription carved upon the monument. In fact, tombs to dead animals have been found all over the Roman Empire, as have the graves of humans buried together with a beloved pet. In his *Amores* (2.6), the poet Ovid discusses the tomb of a parrot:

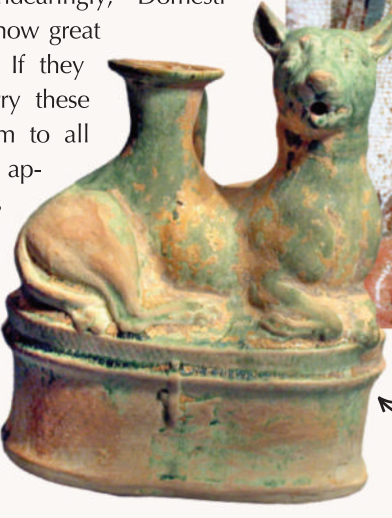
> *The mimic is dead, that winged one from the east, from India. A burial mound now holds his bones … his little tombstone bears his fitting epitaph 'Here lies one who delighted his mistress'.*

A copper alloy vessel, dated to the third to fourth century AD, in the shape of a sitting bear with a chain around its neck.

© The Metropolitan Museum of Art

Other birds were also kept as pets. Partridges often appear in paintings of Roman life, and not just on the dinner table. With their docile nature and beautiful plumage they made good pets. Another avian pet well known to followers of Roman literature is the sparrow of Lesbia, the amoratrix of the poet Catullus. The sparrow was probably chosen by the poet because, according to the Pliny the Elder, the sparrow was "the most salacious of all birds". Some of the verses of Catullus are indeed salacious – to put it mildly.

Despite the scorn of the emperor Augustus for foreigners carrying around pet monkeys (Plutarch, *Pericles* 1.1), it did not take long before his fellow Romans adopted the habit. Pet apes seem to have been none too rare a sight if Galen, doctor to the emperor Marcus Aurelius, is to be taken at face value when he discusses children and apes playing together (*De usu partium* 3.16). These pets seem to have been usually Ethiopian monkeys or Barbary apes. One of the latter appears on a Pompeian fresco where a child is teaching it to dance. Pliny the Elder tells us how, endearingly, "Domesticated female [apes] show great delight when petted. If they have young they carry these about and show them to all comers and seem to appreciate the kindness shown to them" (*Natural History* 8.80).



An *askos* ('oil container'), dated to the first century AD, in the shape of a reclining dog.

© The Metropolitan Museum of Art

On the other hand, one feels for the owner who had to suffer the consequences when his pet ape escaped into a temple of the goddess Ceres and wrecked the place.

Oddly enough, that other most common of pets in the modern west – the domestic cat – hardly gets a mention in the Roman sources. Where cats are portrayed in Roman art, they are often in the process of contemplating or committing culinary larceny upon items destined for the dinner table. In the early modern era, cats were less pets than domestic rodent control, but the Romans preferred weasels – partly because ownership of these was also obeisance to the goddess Hecate to whom the weasel was sacred. Snakes were also kept about the house for the same reason – they were both sacred and good mousers. Household animals were clearly kept for a variety of purposes, from pets to pest control. **AH**

***Philip Matyszak** is a regular contributor to **Ancient History** magazine.*

A small sarcophagus, decorated with a sculpture of a lap dog, dated to the third century AD. Romans were very fond of their animal companions, not just dogs, and it was quite common for people to commission monuments to commemorate their passing.

© George E. Koronaios / Wikimedia Commons

A mosaic depicting two parrots and a pigeon drinking from a bird bath while a cat prepares to pounce from below. Birds were kept as pets in ancient Rome, with some people even teaching them to mimic human speech. Cats, however, despite their modern popularity, were not so common.

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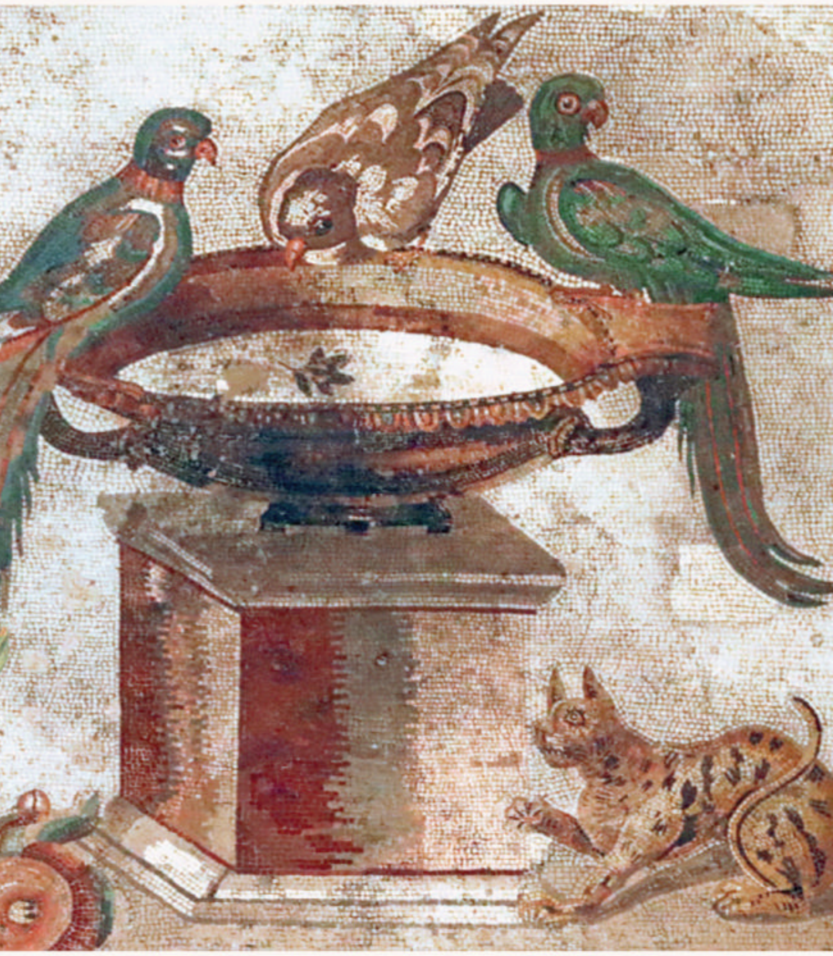
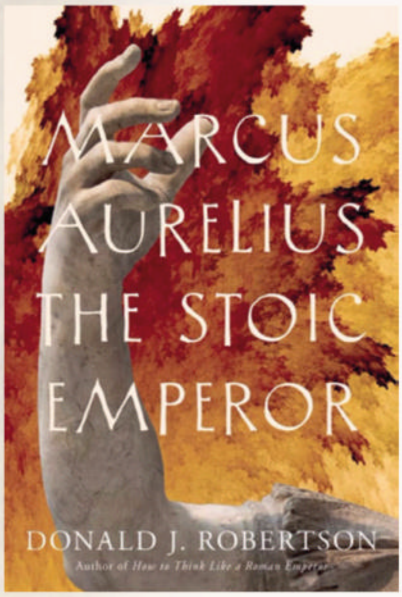




Marcus Aurelius
The Stoic Emperor

By Donald J. Roberston
ISBN: 978-0300280142
Yale University Press (2024) - $26.00

yalebooks.yale.edu

Marcus Aurelius is one of the most recognizable names from ancient history. While he reigned for just nineteen years (AD 161–180), he nevertheless left a lasting impression. Indeed, the emperor has enjoyed a revival in more recent years. In this latest biography of the Roman emperor, Donald J. Robertson (who has previously written on Marcus Aurelius' philosophy), according to the publisher, "weaves together Marcus' inner journey as a philosopher with the outer events of his life as a Roman emperor".

In Robertson's concise and unadorned text, Marcus Aurelius emerges as an affable, humane, kind, emotionally sensitive, introspective, and affectionate individual. We witness him raised by his devoted but widowed 'Little Mother' Domitia Lucilla, and tutored by an influential, but unknown, personal Greek slave, mastering oratory in Greek under the Sophist Herodes Atticus and Latin under Cornelius Fronto, and dabbling in writing a history (which he never completes). As a six-year-old, he is noticed by Emperor Hadrian, who promotes him into the Equestrian Order and the College of the Salii (where he learns to perform archaic ritual songs and dances). He gains a reputation for plain speaking and earns the epithet *Verissimus* ('Most Truthful') from Hadrian himself.

Aurelius disliked Hadrian and detested the "vicious nature of court life" (p. 37). Nevertheless, when he reached manhood in AD 136, Hadrian appointed Aurelius to prefect of the Latin Festival, in which role the young man impressed Roman high society. Living through Hadrian's last years of vendettas and political purges, Marcus Aurelius found himself destined to succeed his uncle, Antoninus Pius, who reigned as interim ruler after Hadrian's death in AD 138.

Antoninus adopted Aurelius as his son and promoted him swiftly through the *cursus honorum*, granting him the name Caesar in recognition of his status in AD 140. Aurelius regarded Antoninus Pius "as his main role model" (p. 65) and tried to replicate his manner and leadership style. He married Faustina who bore him several children, including the infamous Commodus. In this period, he also developed chest pains and ulcers, which would greatly weaken his health.

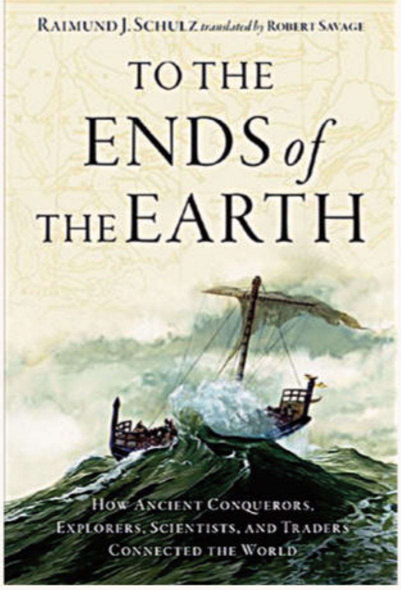
When Antoninus Pius died in AD 161, Marcus Aurelius became co-emperor with Lucius Verus. The *Augustan History* and Cassius Dio both mention that, on the night he received news of his succession, he dreamed he had arms and shoulders of ivory capable of lifting great weight. The two colleagues worked well together. Verus crossed the Euphrates to lead a war against Parthia. Having won it, Verus embarked with Aurelius across the Danube on a campaign against the Marcomanni. Tragically, Verus died *en route*. Now Rome's sole commander-in-chief, Aurelius' mettle was tested by a decade-long war against the Marcomanni, Quadi, and Iazyges. Meanwhile, plague spread, decimating the empire's population.

His collection of writings, begun around AD 170 in the midst of war, is known nowadays as *Meditations*. It was his personal lifetime's collection of observations and musings written in Greek – his "real legacy" (p. 179). Robertson asserts that it is impossible to understand Marcus Aurelius without his philosophy, and has, therefore, cited *Meditations* over 100 times "to highlight the connections between its author's Stoic principles and the way he actually conducted his life" (p. 6). In his youth, Aurelius devoted himself to austere philosophy, for a time even wearing the rough woollen cloak favoured by Greek philosophers. As the years passed "He gradually trained himself to manage his emotions by examining them rationally rather than merely suppressing them" (p. 5), an evolution, Robertson writes, that is clearly traceable in his writings. The self-directed process was, in effect, "a kind of psychological therapy" (p. 6) that helped him get closer to achieving *apatheia*, the ideal Stoical state of "freedom from pathological emotions" (p. 6) or "indifference" (p. 28).

With Robertson's professional background as a cognitive-behaviour psychotherapist, it is disappointing that the author did not use his expertise to build a psychological profile of his subject. Psychoanalysis is mentioned on a single page in a discussion of Aurelius seeking "therapy for the mind" (p. 77); Aurelius turned to Junius Rusticus, who was a follower of Epictetus' brand of Stoicism, for help to overcome his faults, vanity, and anger. It is a missed opportunity.

Nevertheless, Robertson's biography will provide the reader planning to study *Meditations* with the historical context in which the Stoic emperor gained his insights, giving them additional meaning and poignancy. **AH**

– Lindsay Powell


RAIMUND J. SCHULZ translated by ROBERT SAVAGE
TO THE ENDS of THE EARTH
HOW ANCIENT CONQUERORS, EXPLORERS, SCIENTISTS, AND TRADERS CONNECTED THE WORLD

To the Ends of the Earth

By Raimund J. Schulz
Translated by Robert Savage
ISBN: 978-0197668023
Oxford University Press (2024) - £22.99

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Ancient history, despite its non-specific title, tends to focus almost solely on Greece and Rome. Consequently, it is easy to forget that, beyond the historical horizons of Greece and Rome, other ancient societies existed in a complex web of interconnected relations with one another. Now, in what is, according to the publisher, "the first modern history of ancient exploration in over a century", Raimund J. Schulz seeks to place Greco-Roman antiquity in a global context, studying the gradual expansion of the Greco-Romans' knowledge of the distant corners of the world. As Schulz writes, "This book seeks to explain how this [expansion of knowledge] came about, what drove the ancients to push the limits of the known world, how far they ventured, and the consequences of this continuous expansion" (p. 2). After all, "long-distance expeditions formed the basis for transregional cultural contacts, colonial settlement movements, military and political expansion, and economic integration" (p. 3). Despite the emphasis on exploration and the interaction between different societies, Schulz is aware of the limitations of giving a voice to the different peoples encountered in the book – the evidence is heavily skewed in favour of the Greeks and Romans. Consequently, much of the book is from the perspective of Greek and Roman travellers, but Schulz makes an admirable effort to explore the perspective of Indians, Central Asians, and Chinese "so they no longer appear as passive objects of Graeco-Roman exploration but as equal, integral actors" (p. 7). Concerning Indian Ocean trade, for example, Schulz notes how, long before Greek and Roman ships sailed the waves, Indian and Arab traders had already connected both sides of the ocean.

Schulz is also aware of the reputation that studies of ancient exploration have. Due to misguided attempts to locate Atlantis and the regular appearance of dubious evidence for ancient trans-Atlantic voyages, such studies have been "tainted by a whiff of frivolity" (p. 3). According to Schulz, "Audacious speculation sits alongside a hyper-critical attitude that would discredit any attempt at reconstruction" (p. 2). Schulz, therefore, takes an open-minded approach to the evidence in an attempt at striking a middle ground between these two contrasting viewpoints, best exemplified by his serious consideration of the evidence for the possibility of a trans-Atlantic voyage in antiquity (pp. 261–265, 354–356).

The book follows a chronological narrative, chronicling the evidence for exploratory voyages from the Late Bronze Age through to the second century AD, before ending with a discussion of how ancient accounts of explorers influenced Medieval and Early Modern explorers. As the book progresses, it feels as though Schulz's confidence grows, as if he has a greater familiarity with the later Roman material. This is especially obvious in the first chapter, covering almost 1000 years of history, in which the most noticeable issues appear, from spelling mistakes to incorrect statements, while later chapters cover far less time in similar page counts. For example, Al Mina, a trading settlement on the northern Syrian coast, is described as a "Euboean colony" (p. 38), despite the evidence for any such identification being ambiguous at best. Furthermore, while noting that the Homeric epics were based, in part, on oral traditions, Schulz does not engage with the consequences of this nor with the various theories about the development of the Homeric epics, instead attributing the Homeric epics to a single poet, with no elaboration as to why he does so. This, unfortunately, seriously undermines the credibility of Schulz's argument that the *Odyssey* is an educational narrative about seafaring.

As this book is a translation, it is difficult to discern how much these issues stem from the translation or were Schulz's original input. For example, when discussing the presence of Mycenaeans in Anatolia, Schulz writes how Ahhiyawa was "most commonly associated with Mycenae" (p. 21). To my mind, Mycenaean Greece would be a better fit for this statement. Another example reads "The Indian king spoke Greece" (p. 353).

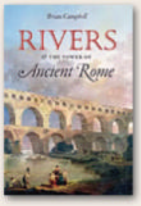
However, these issues are largely confined to the first chapters of the book. Despite the occasional dubious statement or argument based on insufficient evidence (or elaborated on insufficiently), *To the Ends of the Earth* is a fascinating, ambitious, and thought-provoking account of ancient exploration. By placing exploration in its wider societal context, Schulz offers a reason why people seemed to regularly – even keenly – sail into the unknown, and how these explorations created more opportunities to explore farther afield, developed ancient notions of science and medicine, and even contributed to the discovery of the Americas in the fifteenth century. **AH**

– Owain Williams

READINGS: RIVERS IN ANTIQUITY

Want to learn more about how rivers influenced ancient civilizations? Here are some books & articles to check out.

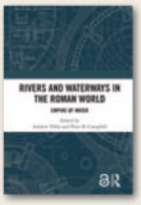
RIVERS AND THE POWER OF ANCIENT ROME



By Brian Campbell
University of North Carolina Press, 2011
ISBN: 978-146966866

The Roman Empire covered a vast swathe of territory, encompassing many rivers, both great and small. In this book, Brian Campbell explores the role and influence of rivers on the society and culture of the Roman world. Campbell explores a variety of aspects of rivers, such as their importance to trade and transport, and their use in military strategy.

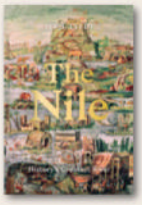
RIVERS AND WATERWAYS IN THE ROMAN WORLD: EMPIRE OF WATER



Edited by Andrew Tibbs and P.B. Campbell
Routledge, 2023
ISBN: 978-1003277613

Adopting a cross-disciplinary approach, this book – a collection of articles by historians and archaeologists – examines the Romans' uses of rivers and waterways. With each chapter focusing on a specific use of rivers by the Romans, from the Rhine frontier to the Po trade route. The book also discusses the difficulties of riverine archaeology.

THE NILE: HISTORY'S GREATEST RIVER



By Terje Tvedt
I.B. Tauris, 2021
ISBN: 978-1350522237

The Nile is the most recognizable river in the ancient world. In *The Nile*, Terje Tvedt offers a 5000-year history of the river, charting the economic, political, and mythical significance of the river from pre-history to the modern day, weaving in elements of history, folklore, and nature, exploring the many cultures and societies that have lived along the Nile.

BOG BODIES UNCOVERED: SOLVING EUROPE'S ANCIENT MYSTERY

Bog Bodies Uncovered

By Miranda Aldhouse Green
Thames and Hudson, 2015
ISBN: 978-0500051825

While not the most common of Celtic water deposits, bog bodies are certainly the most enigmatic. Renowned archaeologist Miranda Aldhouse-Green, employing up-to-date research and scientific methods, explores the surviving bog bodies, from Ireland to Germany, treating their deposits as crime scenes, to explain what they reveal about the pre-Roman Iron Age.

Other books and articles

Weapons, wealth, and bog bodies *(Ian Armit)*

- Davenport, P. *Roman Bath: A New History and Archaeology of Aquae Sulis*. Stroud: The History Press, 2021.
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On the edge of civilization *(Timothy Hart)*

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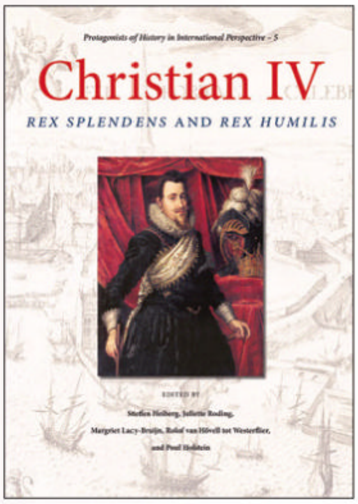
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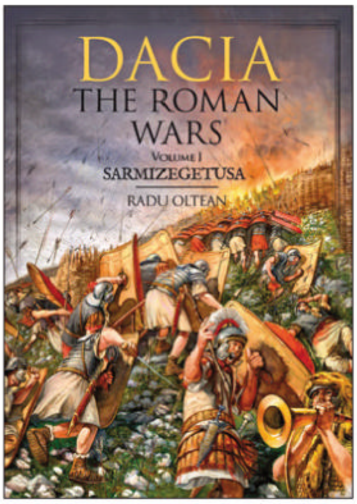
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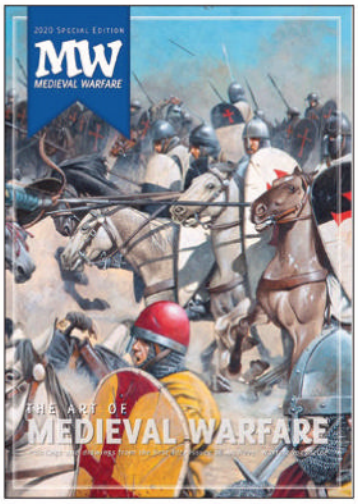
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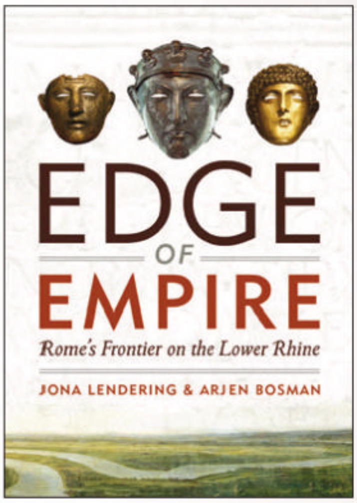
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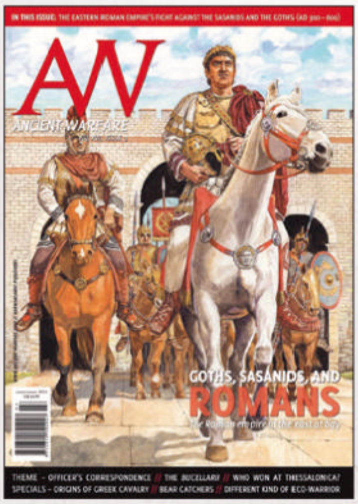
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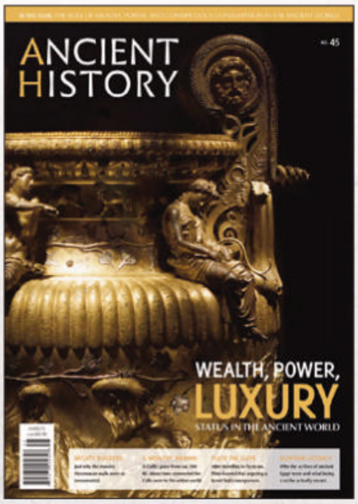
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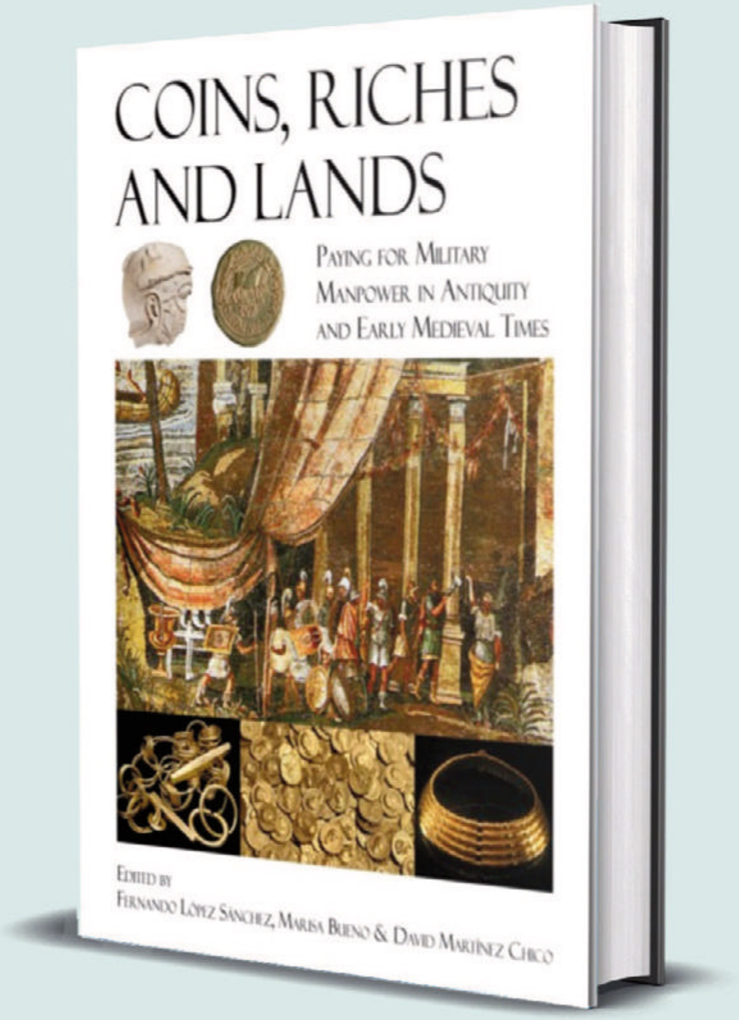
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